



DOOMSDAY WONDERLAND

BOOK 01

Beards And Tails

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Doomsday Wonderland

(末日乐园)

by

Beards And Tails

Synopsis

What if earth devolved into a apocalyptic hellhole? What if you found out you not only have to survive just one apocalyptic event but have to struggle through multiple worlds with different end-world scenarios? And you get to meet more superpowered crazies than you can imagine!

Presenting the worst nightmare that your weird doomsday prepper neighbour with a bunker full of canned beans could have, Domsday Wonderland is a novel filled with subverted tropes, non-OP characters and a female friendly label which offends all politically correct fanatics.

As 'lucky' humans evolved to posthumans with abilities to adapt to the New World or mutate into disgusting duoluozhongs to survive, follow Lin Sanjiu as she struggle through the multiple challenges to just live one more day... and make sense of this New World that will no longer be the same.

Acknowledgement

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Chapter 1: Cinderella's Fear

Cinderella's Fear

"I think that my boyfriend is... planning to murder me."

It was the weekend, and the Macdonald's they were in was filled with parents who had brought their children, there were also incessant shrills and laughter from the children who were playing on the slide in the play area. Naturally, it was difficult for the fair and plump Zhu Mei to believe what her good friend had said.

"That's nonsense! Even if both of you are quarreling, don't badmouth someone to that degree," Zhu Mei scolded jokingly. Pausing a while, she raised her eyebrow asking rather hesitantly, "When both of you quarrel, it doesn't get physical right?"

The woman who was sitting opposite from her was about 20 plus years old. Even though her features could be considered quite exquisite, in a bustling cosmopolitan city like theirs, she couldn't be considered a rare beauty. However, her most attention-drawing feature was her pair of slightly upturned large eyes. Within her light-colored pupil was an amber luster which you couldn't help associating with expensive cats.

Lin Sanjiu shook her head and did not continue. She couldn't blame Zhu Mei for not believing her; saying such words seemed even somewhat preposterous to herself. Perhaps it was because she had not slept well, she felt rather anxious... Lin Sanjiu took two sips of Coca-Cola, not knowing what frame of mind she was in, she half-jokingly said, "If a day comes when the police ask who I usually don't get along with..."

"Sheesh!" The bantering tone of her friend relieved Zhu Mei of the shreds of doubt she previously had. She waved her hand and cheerily commented, "Really, you got a great deal! Say, what are Ren Nan's shortcomings?"

The last half of the sentence blew past her like a breeze, Lin Sanjiu did not even listen. Her pair of cat-like eyes swept the surroundings outside the window, as her lower jaw slightly tightened.

Seeming to conceal that, she tilted her head down and took a bite out of her hamburger.

At that moment, the noisy Macdonald's suddenly fell silent for a few seconds. As the doorway darkened, a tall man walked in a steady pace. A few customers in a queue unconsciously step aside, opening a path for him.

Wearing a custom-tailored steel gray shirt, with a uniquely Armani's slim fit design, every detail seemed to portray a dignified quality. His well-pressed dark colored pants, elegantly fitted him without any creases, as if there were professionals to iron it anytime. Additionally, he had a 1:9 body ratio that Asians rarely had and good looks to boot. At any time, Ren Nan looked like a top model who had just walked out from some fashion show — right into a Macdonald's. It was no wonder that he got glances from the crowd.

As he sat down, there was a slight fragrance of Davidoff Cool Water cologne in the air.

“Why are you eating such fast food again?” He nodded, acknowledging Zhu Mei while he gently touched Sanjiu's hair as if not knowing what to do with her. His Patek Philippe watch was half buried in her hair. “I even planned to take you to that Japanese restaurant we went previously.”

“When I walked past, I just felt hungry, so...” Lin Sanjiu forced a smile, avoiding Ren Nan's gaze. She lowered her head and put a single french fry in her mouth. Her hair slipped from her shoulders, blocking the view of her expression.

Saying that Ren Nan had some sort of flaw seemed almost unimaginable.

After dating for a few months, Ren Nan had quickly won over her buddies and friends with his perfect demeanor, much less Lin Sanjiu herself. No, not only his demeanor; his looks, wealth, personality; every aspect was so perfect... he was exactly what women dreamed of.

Everyone told her fate treated her too well.

When they just started dating, Lin Sanjiu almost couldn't believe how lucky she was. At that time, she woke up smiling every morning, embracing the new world that Ren Nan brought to her.

When did she starting feeling there was something wrong?

Suddenly, Zhu Mei's enthusiastic voice broke her train of thought. "I have taken a day of Xiao Jiu's time, I won't interrupt both of your sweet time together! She just told me that she was a little tired, why don't both of you go back?"

Lin Sanjiu was pulled back to reality.

Ren Nan's gentle voice always had a fittingly cheerful tone. "Let us send you back. Recently, the weather has been too hot."

Zhu Mei had a childish temperament and immediately smiled, replying, "Oh, then I just take up on that offer! It is so bloody hot today, I just walked for a while, and I am covered with perspiration..." The clothes on her back were still damp.

As she did not have much appetite and saw that her good friend had finished eating, Lin Sanjiu readily stood up. Her boyfriend and good friend followed suit and walked out of the Macdonald's.

The pavement outside had been baked by the afternoon sun, as a wave of heat surrounded the three of them. It was already October, but the intense heat did not show any sign of retreating, it continued holding their cosmopolitan city in its grip. Some of the people on the streets held umbrellas, and others had their forehead covered with perspiration. Everyone's face showed much discomfort — it was really too hot. Even at the height of summer,

it wasn't that hot!

Zhu Mei was most afraid of the hot weather; she had only walked a few steps but was already covered in sweat and had to continuously wipe her forehead. Lin Sanjiu could feel several strands of her hair sticking to the skin at the back of her neck. As she could not stand this unpleasant feeling, she couldn't help asking, "Where did you park your car?"

Ren Nan lifted his head and looked over to the location not far from them; his skin was clean and dry without even a bit of perspiration. "It is right in front," he paused a while, keeping his usual elegant and calm demeanor, "I already told you a few times, not owning a car is too inconvenient. Since you have already gotten your driving license, do you want to buy a car?"

Zhu Mei immediately exclaimed enviously, "You plan to buy a car for Xiao Jiu? You are really a Mr. Perfect. My boyfriend only bought me a teddy bear for my birthday..."

Lin Sanjiu replied superficially with some agreeing sound, while she was totally not thinking about the car. It was lucky that Zhu Mei was a lively person, as Zhu Mei chatted noisily with Ren Nan, he did not notice the unease that Sanjiu felt.

Three months before, Lin Sanjiu had finally sweetly agreed to Ren Nan's countless request for her to move in. She packed her things, ended her housing rental, and moved to his condominium situated in the middle of the city. The many friends and colleagues who visited her new accommodation were all extremely envious. The moment they step out of the apartment, they would immediately pull her over and tell her, "Xiao Jiu. You must hold on to such a good guy!"

"Does Ren Nan have any brothers? Or friends who are still single? Don't forget to introduce one to me!"

"You should talk to him about marriage soon..."

Her friends' celebratory voices seemed to reverberate in her ears. The emotions and excitement in Lin Sanjiu's heart were ten times her friends'. However, after they had stayed together for some time, her IQ which had been lowered due to being in love, had slowly recovered.

She started to gradually notice the details of her daily life.

Right now, Lin Sanjiu really couldn't explain it, but she felt a little fearful of Ren Nan.

After Zhu Mei had disappeared around the corner of the old street, Ren Nan restarted the engine and the sound of the car merge with the traffic. In about 20 mins, both were back at home.

Ren Nan's condominium was located in the most expensive district, and its construction was only completed two years before. Every inch of tile represented a kind of lifestyle that only normal folks like Lin Sanjiu could dream of. And now, she had almost gotten used to her new lifestyle — if not for the cloud of doubt in her heart that got heavier day after day...

The penthouse apartment occupied the entire 38th floor. Following the “ding” sound of their personal elevator, the door opened, and both of them walked into the living room.

Responding to the movement of the elevator, the living room's soft lights switched on one by one.

“I bought some cola today, do you want a can?” Putting down her bag, Lin Sanjiu headed to the kitchen. She hid the thumping of her heartbeat and smiled at Ren Nan as if nothing happened — conscious that her expression hid her feelings perfectly.

Ren Nan also walked over, wearing his usual tender smile, “Okay, whatever you buy is great.”

She didn't know when it started, but this sort of fairytale like sweet talk sounded strange to Lin Sanjiu. Totally not knowing how to reply, she hurriedly handed over the cola — once he pulled open

the can tab, the gas in the drink came out with a “sss sss” sound. Probably to make her happy, he drank half a can of the drink in one mouth.

Lin Sanjiu hid behind the pulled open fridge door; her body tensed up as she perked up her ears not wanting to miss a sound.

The room was silent for half a minute.

Seconds after seconds passed until Ren Nan’s laughter broke the silence in the room. “What are you looking for in the fridge?”

Lin Sanjiu’s heart fell into the pit of her stomach. She closed the door and acted casually as she observed Ren Nan.

No reaction.

Swallowing a can of cola full of carbon dioxide down into his stomach, Ren Nan did not even show an intention of burping — as if he had just drunk a black pool of stagnant water.

“Nothing, I just wanted to see if there were any snacks.” She forced a smile.

Living together for 3 months, she had never even seen Ren Nan burp once.

Not just burping — coughing, sneezing, farting, sweating... all this sort of unsightly bodily functions that everyone had, Lin Sanjiu had never seen Ren Nan having.

If she thought about it carefully, she was not sure if she ever even saw him using the toilet.

“You didn’t even eat much just now. Why don’t we go out for dinner tonight?” Ren Nan pulled both her arms and gave a kiss on Lin Sanjiu’s neck.

Goosebumps surfaced all over her back, “Nah, it’s okay. I am too lazy to move... plus I want to sleep early tonight; I have to wake up early tomorrow.”

“Well, then I will personally cook you some salmon,” Ren Nan

replied smilingly.

Lin Sanjiu nodded her head quickly.

Ren Nan's cooking skills were like himself, perfect without flaws. After eating the dinner he had meticulously prepared, the sun outside the living room's glass windows was slowly setting to the west. As the sky darkened, it turned to a star-filled nightfall.

"There is an ongoing global heatwave. And today is the 104th day..." After clearing up the dinner utensils, Lin Sanjiu watched the television as if she was interested in the news. She honestly did not want to match gaze with Ren Nan. "Following the deaths due to hyperthermia in Africa, India, and Southeast Asia, our country's death toll due to heat stroke has already reached 67 people. Relevant experts remind all..."

She felt Ren Nan walked over, sitting beside her and the sofa sinking down.

An arm settled on her shoulder naturally, and Lin Sanjiu's body stiffened.

Even though she did not turn her head, she could feel that he wasn't watching the television.

Chapter 2: Blistering Hot Night with a Steak

What was the difference between the temperature from midnight to 1 am?

If things went as usual, no one would probably feel it.

However, tonight was vastly different. The sun had long been set, but the temperature of the sweltering heat in the air seem to rise gradually with each passing minute. And to make matters worse, it had been days since there was even a little wind. The surrounding air outside the windows was no longer just air, but suffocating, scalding hot air which was waiting to rush towards you.

As if someone had given an order, the small number of families in the city who, for various reasons did not switch on their air conditioner, had also switched them on. Whereas, the people without air conditioners simply could not tolerate it any longer. Pubs, 24-hour convenience stores, offices... Wherever there was a trace of cool air, they would go.

After 30 minutes, with a “Ke Da” sound, a few night lights in the 38th-floor apartment were extinguished. The room was plunged into an absolute darkness — the constant soft buzzing sound in the bedroom had also unknowingly stopped at some point in time.

The central air conditioning had stopped.

After the air conditioner had stopped, Lin Sanjiu tossed frustratingly whilst asleep. Without the maintained temperature of a comfortable 26°C, her body was quickly covered in a layer of sweat. This layer of sweat was like an unbreathable blanket, and before long she woke up due to the heat.

“Ughh... the remote control seems to be on the bedside cabinet...” a thought flashed passed her hazy mind. As she was about to stretch out her hand to reach for it, she suddenly felt that

something was wrong. She immediately stopped moving her hand. After remaining motionless for a while, she squinted slightly and peeked upward.

A snowy white face hung directly above her own face, two black, cavernous eyes stared straight at her.

“Again! It's that again!” A loud screech exploded in Lin Sanjiu's mind, yet her throat was so dry she couldn't even make a sound. Her heartbeat became faster and faster, louder and louder, and that white face leaned in with his ear to listen; with a swiftness, it came closer to Lin Sanjiu.

Two weeks before, she had once woken up in the middle of the night because she was thirsty. When she got up, she knocked that face. At that time, she was so shocked that she yelped and scrambled to switch on the lights. Only to find that it was Ren Nan.

She didn't know when Ren Nan had sat beside her, with an expressionless face in the dark, how long he had been staring at her in this manner — just like tonight.

He explained that since young he often sleepwalked.

If it weren't for her doubts, she would have believed him. At that moment, she forced down her fears and acted like she hadn't woken up. She rubbed her eyes and asked casually, “Ren Nan, are you sleepwalking again?”

In the dark, a smile cracked on Ren Nan's face. “Yes, I've done it again. I didn't scare you, did I?” he spoke totally articulately.

“A.. a little...” Lin Sanjiu got out of the bed almost as if escaping. She stood at the door which gave her a false impression that she could escape anytime, so she calmed down a little. Only then did she felt the steamer-like temperature of the room. “Why is it so hot? Did you switch off the air conditioner?”

Ren Nan didn't say a thing. He pulled open the thick, heavy curtains, revealing the set of full-length windows. Normally, Lin

Sanjiu could see the dazzling night scene of half the city through these windows. On this night, however, the city had lost its everlasting illumination. Even the starlight was blocked by the clouds, leaving only a dead darkness.

In the apartment with closed doors and closed windows, it was so stuffy that it was even hard to breath.

“The electrical load must be too high; it seems like there is a power outage throughout the city.” There was still a cheerfulness in Ren Nan’s voice which showed his composure. While he spoke, he slowly stood up, walking past the end of the bed and headed to the door, step by step.

Suddenly, the alarm bells in Lin Sanjiu’s mind rang. Without waiting for him to approach, she rushed towards the living room. She finally got some repayment for the decorating and cleaning of this penthouse over these three months; in this pitch-black darkness, she still succeeded to reach the living room entrance. Without stopping to take a breath, with a “bash”, she stretched out her hand and smashed the elevator button.

Unexpectedly, it didn’t light up red. There isn’t a backup power supply system in such an expensive condominium?!

“The backup power supply is only for the lights in the stairways; they couldn't care less for the lifts — even more so personal ones.” The voice came from behind her; a voice which she had known for half a year. Ren Nan was just as gentle, but as he enunciated his words, Lin Sanjiu heard a wetness in his tone. As if... Ren Nan could not control the saliva secreting in his mouth.

In the dark, the shadowy, blurry outline which represented Ren Nan crept towards her, finally stopping in the middle of the living room.

Lin Sanjiu felt giddy. Her sixth sense was right. A sense of regret welled up in her heart, “What... what do you want to do?”

“Your senses are quite keen,” Ren Nan swallowed a mouthful of saliva, “You should have already felt it? But you should really listen more closely to your intuition... otherwise, you wouldn't have followed me back here. Over these few days, you should have felt conflicted... I really should thank you for your trust.”

Lin Sanjiu did not realize it herself, but her clenched fists were now trembling uncontrollably.

“Xiao Jiu, in such a hot weather, are you sweating a lot?” Ren Nan suddenly asked such a random question with concern.

Lin Sanjiu was stunned. She touched her arm subconsciously, finding that she only had a thin layer of perspiration on her skin. She started wondering why he would ask about this now.

Ren Nan nodded his head in a satisfied manner. “Xiao Jiu, you're great! I didn't groom you for half a year in vain...”

What the hell was he talking about? She did not understand a single thing he was saying. Lin Sanjiu wanted to open her mouth to say something, but realized that her jaw was quivering. The thought that had been in her head for these few days made her say something that she never thought she would. “Are you going to... eat me?”

“Your intuition is really sharp!” the black figure praised.

Lin Sanjiu was infuriated by his attitude. A complex mixture of fear, indignation, and bewilderment arose, and she did not feel as helpless as before. “Stop bullshitting! Who are you? Why did you choose me? Don't you dare try anything! All my friends know that I am staying at your place...” the words flowed out like a tidal wave.

She purposely raised her voice, secretly hoping that someone would be able to hear her, as she felt her way to the open-concept kitchen at the side of the living room.

Ren Nan sighed. “On the account that you have accompanied me

for 6 months, I will explain things to you before you die.” He raised his hands and snapped his fingers.

With a sudden “boom”, one of the glass walls in the living room shattered into a thousand pieces. A wave of heat, unlike what Lin Sanjiu had felt before, rushed past the glass pieces and engulfed the room. This was accompanied by a muffled scream from a distance. The last bit of remaining leftover cool air from the air-conditioner was swallowed in an instant.

“Why... why is it so hot?” It was as if someone had taken the entire city and roasted it over a barbecue pit! Before Lin Sanjiu could react, Ren Nan spoke in his gentle voice again: “From night onwards, this world is no longer the world that you people are familiar with. In this new world, according to your metric, it is... oh... 56°C.”

Lin Sanjiu was dumbfounded. At 56°C, normal humans would have died a few times over due to acute hyperthermia and severe dehydration. With this sudden thought, she quickly touched the back of her neck. Unexpectedly, Lin Sanjiu did not really sweat much more.

“See! I have only nurtured you for a few months, and you already evolved and gain the ‘Heat Resistance Adaptation’ and ‘Keen Senses’ traits. Two traits... as expected from a potential seed I've spotted the first time I saw you. Too bad, this new world came too early; otherwise, I would have liked to nurture you for two years before consuming...”

After the glass wall was shattered, there a dim light flooded the living room. With the aid of that bit of light, Lin Sanjiu could see Ren Nan's face clearly.

His usual handsome model-like features gradually gave way to his large mouth, that kept getting wider and wider. Clear bright saliva poured from the corners of his mouth without restraint, and at this time, Lin Sanjiu was already forced to the corner of the

kitchen.

“ I... I still don't understand! What sort of creature are you? Why do you want to eat me? I don't know what evolution or powers you are talking about. Didn't you say you would explain it to me? Then, tell me!”

Even if she could only delay him for one minute, it would give her a shred of opportunity! Lin Sanjiu used her shouting voice as she secretly stretched out her hand towards the knife holder on the countertop behind her.

His large mouth stopped for a while, and then shrunk a little, revealing Ren Nan's original facial features. “Sigh... Why are you so stupid? Of course, I am a human and Ren Nan is my name. However, I am not like your sort of “backward” types. I come from another “New World”. Anyone who survives a New World will evolve and gain different abilities... I have abilities that you would not even dare to imagine.”

Ren Nan wiped his clammy chin. “You better put that knife down, I am warning you. My eyesight is really good. Just let me eat you obediently, I promise it won't even hurt a bit...”

“No way!” She shouted furiously. Before he barely even finished his sentence, Lin Sanjiu, filled with fear and anger, rushed towards him with a sharp knife in her hand.

The gleaming silver boning knife moved extremely quickly as it drew a bright light in the darkness. Just as the tip of the knife was about to pierce into Ren Nan's chest, he shifted a step silently. Lin Sanjiu missed her target. She staggered forward and slipped on a piece of glass. Unable to keep her balance, she fell heavily to the ground.

His large mouth, which was almost tearing his cheeks apart, lunged forwards to attack Lin Sanjiu. He did not even give her the chance to stand up. In a panic, she only managed to turn aside and flung out the boning knife. Ren Nan dodged quickly but still

received a shallow cut from the knife.

With a clash, the knife fell some distance away.

Angered and humiliated, Ren Nan pinned Lin Sanjiu to the ground, he stared at her black pupils which had shrunk to the size of a pinhead. “A steak should act like a steak!”

In the dim light, Lin Sanjiu watched in despair as the black figure close in on her throat.

Chapter 3: Card of Something, What Kind of Nonsense is That?

Ren Nan sank his teeth into the fresh tender flesh of the young woman. The smell of iron rust filled the air as his chin was dyed red by her fresh blood. He only needed to bite down a little harder, and Lin Sanjiu's fragile life will forever disappear from this world.

But Ren Nan could not move. It wasn't that he did not want to eat this good progeny, he just could not move. At that moment, there was a kitchen knife in the back of Ren Nan's head. Its blade was fully embedded, and only its handle remained in sight.

There was still a shred of excitement in Ren Nan's eyes — even as he died, he could not understand the situation. Lin Sanjiu was bare-handed, she was just struggling uselessly with her arms in the air. [How could he just die like that?]

Momentarily, Lin Sanjiu could only hear the intense drum-like thumping of her heart. “Ba-dump. Ba-dump.” Her heart pounded as she laid under the heavy corpse. Overcoming the sharp pain in her neck, she used all her strength and finally pushed Ren Nan off. “Thump!” The corpse rolled off her and laid supine on the floor. With that, the knife in Ren Nan's head was pushed further in. The blade pierced through, revealing itself in his large opened mouth.

Lin Sanjiu held her neck tightly. One of her hands was already covered in blood. She rapidly took in a few large gulps of air before giving a ruthless kick to the corpse on the floor. She cursed softly with her hoarse voice, “Who told you that I only evolved to get two abilities?” she only muttered a few words, but the acute pain around her throat was too unbearable.

Just seconds after kicking the corpse, Lin Sanjiu's vision went dark. She almost fell — the dizziness brought by her loss of blood hit her faster than she thought it would. Everything else did not matter now. Right now, the most important thing for her was to

bandage her wound. She staggered around finding for a towel. When she found one, she placed it on her neck and applied heavy pressure to her wound. She gasped. She sat on the floor again and pressed the towel to her neck with all the strength she could muster.

After being in a state of half-consciousness for some time, the bleeding finally stopped. It seems that it was not her time to die yet; after all the bite missed her arteries. After she had rested for a while, she managed to accumulate barely enough energy to somehow stand up to get herself some water.

After she had put the glass of water down, she noticed that Ren Nan's bizarre-looking corpse was still lying silently on the floor.

After some consideration, Lin Sanjiu dragged her weakened self and stood beside the corpse. Trembling, she put one of the hands on the corpse and whispered hoarsely, "Store this."

Just as she finished her sentence, a white light flashed across her palm rapidly. The corpse, with a knife sticking out from it, disappeared. With a "pa" sound, a card which was the size of a poker card fell to the ground.

Lin Sanjiu felt for her mobile phone and used it to illuminate the card. Just as she expected, there was a simple squiggly crayon drawing of a man with a wide opened mouth and a sharp knife sticking out of his head. There was also a row of blank words underneath it: "Ren Nan's Corpse".

【Ren Nan's Corpse】

Name: Can't you read the card title?

Species: Human

Status: Dead

Potential Growth Value: 204

Murder Suspect: Lin Sanjiu

Passive Skills: Extreme Temperature Adaption, Strength Augmentation, Strength Augmentation Body Modification

Active Skills: Good for Me, You and Everyone, Nutritionist

“What the heck is this?” Lin Sanjiu stared at the card, she was speechless for a moment. This weird item was produced by the third ability she had gained. Tonight, it just saved her life.

At will, Lin Sanjiu was able to transform items that she touched into a card and store them in her body. When she wanted to use an item again, with that intention in her mind, the card will revert back to its original form in her hands.

Previously, she threw the boning knife at Ren Nan to lower his defenses and as a ruse. She killed him by actually putting her hand behind the back of his head when she was struggling as he bit her. With a quick thought, the “Chef’s Knife” card that she had hidden in the morning, reverted back to its original form and pierced deeply into Ren Nan’s cerebrum.

After a few days of experimentation, Lin Sanjiu found out that she could only use this item transformation four times.

Even though the cards that she created no longer felt unfamiliar to her, this was the first time that she saw a card which showed such... rich content. She quickly flipped the card and indeed found that the back of the card was filled with tiny little words: “Ren Nan, Male, 28 years old, he came from another ‘New World’. He had been an introvert since young and was not popular with women. He even received a love confession from an older male schoolmate. When the New World arrived, he struggled to survive... you get the point. Anyways, after he had arrived in the world belonging to the murder suspect, Lin Sanjiu, Ren Nan ate a multi-millionaire who had the potential growth value of 2. He took over the man’s wealth and got close with the murder suspect, Lin Sanjiu with a hidden agenda. When he was about to consume Lin Sanjiu, he was killed instead.”

“It is frustrating enough that you don’t reveal what you should, you even labeled me as a ‘murder suspect’?” Feeling a little gloomy, Lin Sanjiu ran her finger across the paragraph. The words disappeared, and the next paragraph slid in and appeared on the surface of the card.

【Good for Me, You and Everyone】: You can spot a person with high potential growth value in a large population with your perception. Through intimate skinship (kissing, hugging, etc.), this ability is able to activate a normal human’s potential, speeding up the party’s evolution and allowing that person to gain their abilities more quickly. This is what’s called a “win-win situation”.

【Nutritionist】:After you finish consuming a person, you can efficiently inherit the potential growth value, evolved abilities and body constituency of your meal. A balanced and nutritious diet will guarantee a better tomorrow.

Note: The knife in his brain was manufactured in Germany. It is sharp, lightweight and sturdy. \$599. Purchased from Jingxi Shopping Mall.

If she did not have her Keen Senses ability, she might think that this was just a dream. She cursed silently as she held on to **【Ren Nan’s Corpse】**, not really knowing what to do. She did not want to place a corpse into a body. After she thought about it for awhile, she simply slid it into her pocket.

Ren Nan’s card had clearly explained his abilities. She wondered if her own card would introduce her abilities and explain more about the so-called “New World”. Even though this was her plan, she could not possibly transform herself into a card. With quick thinking, she plucked a strand of her hair, and said quietly, “Store this!”

With a flash of white light, another card appeared on her hand.

【Hair】

Owner: Lin Sanjiu

Condition: Black, healthy and a little dry on the ends

Function: It is annoying when it gets stuck on a broom.

Note: According to the condition of roots, the owner may start balding around forty.

[What the heck. It was totally useless.] Frustrated, Lin Sanjiu gestured her hand in the air. A white light flashed, and the hair disappeared into the darkness. [Is this a New World with a high-temperature climate?] She was preoccupied with this thought.

56°C... It already felt unbearable for a person like her who had evolved and gained Heat Resistance Adaptation. She wondered what it was like for other normal people.

Suddenly, she shuddered and jumped down from the sofa. Zhu Mei! How did she almost forget her friend? Thinking that Zhu Mei could be in danger right now, Lin Sanjiu ignored the fact that she was still injured. She searched hastily for a backpack and rushed into the kitchen. She stuffed all the bottled beverages and drinks she could find into the backpack. Then, after changing into a more comfortable sports attire, she searched for the keys for the emergency exit and ran into the dark stairway.

After she had run downstairs, she found herself quite breathless; it was 38 floors after all. She wiped the sweat from her forehead, drank a mouthful of water and continued toward the basement.

Ren Nan's car, or rather the car that belonged to the man he had eaten, was parked at basement 1. As Zhu Mei apartment was a twenty minutes drive away, there was no way that Lin Sanjiu would choose to walk in such a high temperature.

Once she stepped into the carpark, Lin Sanjiu was surprised by the heatwave that hit her. As she looked around, she switched off the phone's flashlight expressionlessly.

There was no need for a flashlight here.

At this moment, every single car here had their headlights on. All the cars had their engines running. The rumbling sounds of their engines assaulted the entire space as the acoustics in the carpark amplified the noise by ten times. With hundreds of exhaust pipes spewing out hot air, the half sealed carpark had truly turned into an oven which was at least 3°C to 4°C warmer than the outside temperature.

Everyone who could make it to the carpark was here. Due to the power outage throughout the city, the people who could not endure the harsh high temperatures naturally hid in their own cars where they could find working air-conditioners.

Barely walking just a few steps in this hot stifling space, Lin Sanjiu could feel that the clothes on her back were totally drenched in sweat. When she walked passed each car, she could see the terrified faces of strangers behind every car window. Some of the people were continuously attempting to make calls; some of them were crying uncontrollably as they hugged their children; some people had already lost consciousness, perhaps because they were already dehydrated when they reach the carpark. There were even some people who were staring at her flabbergastingly, apparently unable to understand how she still had the strength to walk around.

Despite the cool air in their cars, many people' faces were faintly shrouded in despair. The air-conditioners in their cars could only merely prolong their time. Once they ran out of petrol or electricity, with the terrifyingly high temperatures outside their cars, there was little chance for anyone in this carpark to survive this.

Lin Sanjiu knew very clearly that she did not have the ability to help these people who were in their cars. She only had five bottles of mineral water, three cans of cola and a few packets of plasters. With this amount of water, she did not know how long she would last. Gritting her teeth, she suppressed the sympathy she felt and

concentrated on looking for the familiar Audi. When she did, she rushed into the car as if she was escaping.

She gave it some thought and decided not to switch on the air-conditioner. She only rolled down the car window. In any case, she would not die from the heat. At most, she would only feel some discomfort. She decided to save the precious petrol and electricity for Zhu Mei. Lin Sanjiu wiped her sweat away, held on to the steering wheel and drove the car slowly out of the carpark.

Compared to the steamer-like environment in the carpark, the 56°C temperature outside made Lin Sanjiu feel slightly better. The streets were empty. There were almost no cars on the road — likely because most people were unwilling to waste that electricity and petrol.

The cars that were parked at the two side of the road were like the cars at the carpark. Their engines were switched on. The people within the cars similarly wore faces of fear and despair as they savored their last bit of cool air.

Just when Lin Sanjiu swerved passed a red Mazda, a sudden black shadow flew towards her from the left. With a low sounding “Bang!”, it hit the Audi’s door violently.

Chapter 4: The Ten minutes with Mom

“I will kill all of you shameless bastards! Hiding in your own cars, with the air-conditioners... in your cars, while letting us suffer! Huh!”

The loud low thump on her car door was accompanied by an angry inarticulate yelling from the side of the road. Scared by the black shadow, Lin Sanjiu lost control of her car for a moment. She hurriedly stepped on the brake. The car let out a horrible sounding, sharp screech, fortunately coming to a stop before she hit the guardrails at the side of the road.

She turned to look behind and saw a man in a sleeveless shirt. He was sweating profusely and was now throwing bricks crazily at the red Mazda. As he threw the bricks, he scolded, “You, You are all trash... Come out here... Come out...” Before he could finish his sentence, he fell backward and fainted. Clearly, she was caught in a crossfire just now.

She exhaled deeply and turned her gaze away from her rear mirror. She could still feel some trepidation. An insane irritability, comas, hallucinations. These were all symptoms of dehydration due to the high temperature...

She took another deep breath, hit the accelerator and sped toward Zhu Mei’s residential complex.

She had been to Zhu Mei’s apartment multiple times before. After twenty minutes, Lin Sanjiu parked the car carefully and turned off the engine after her headlight shined on the “Rongjun Residential Complex” sign. She took the key, carried her backpack, switched on the flashlight on her phone and headed towards the metal door at the entrance of the complex.

The location of the residential complex was a little remote, so usually, there were very little people nearby. Under such circumstances, it was now as quiet as a ghost town. Strangely,

when Lin Sanjiu was reaching the large metal door, she felt her heartbeat stop for a second. She paused.

She scanned her surroundings and found nothing odd. She waited cautiously for another two minutes. Noting that nothing changed, she breathed a sigh of relief.

It seems that her Keen Senses was not a hundred percent accurate.

Rongjun Residential Complex was filled with apartment buildings that were built in the 1990s. Like all old complexes, there was a guardhouse at its entrance. As the area was not very safe, the metal gate would be locked after 12 am. In the event that one of the residents returned late, they could knock on the metal gate, and the security guard on duty that day would bring the key to open the gate for them.

She looked at her watch. It was exactly 2:30 am. Lin Sanjiu stepped forward and knocked on the locked metal gate. The heavy brass lock hit against the metal gate noisily — the ear-piercing noise only dissipated after a while. However, the surroundings remained quiet, without a hint that anyone was nearby.

“Mr. Security Guard, are you there? I am visiting someone from Apartment 2. Could you please open the gate?” her bright voice traveled over some distance in the dark, silent night. Regardless of how hopeful Lin Sanjiu sounded, there was still not even a single response from the guardhouse.

She sighed. This was as expected. She started to have a headache when she looked at the row of anti-climbing spikes above the gate. The residential complex may be old, but that metal gate was newly installed. It was so sturdy that it was hopeless to get past it.

Lin Sanjiu hesitated for awhile before placing her hand on the metal gate.

“Store this!”

Just as she said that, her palm shined with a bright light. This time, however, the white light seemed to glow rather feebly, it flashed across her palm a few times, but the metal gate remained in place. This was the first time that Lin Sanjiu tried transforming something this big and heavy. She could feel her heartbeat gradually beating faster, she was getting breathless, and her muscles were starting to ache...

It felt like her body was weighed down by several thousand pounds of metal bars. Lin Sanjiu's arm started to tremble. Just when she was unable to tolerate it any longer and about to give up, the glow in her palm faded with a "Pa!" sound. The metal gate disappeared and transformed into a card that was now lying on the ground. There was a scribbly kindergartener's level crayon drawing of two metal gates.

At the bottom of the card, it was written:

【Metal gate】

This gate was installed at Rongjun Residential Complex in 2012. Other than its weight, it has no other merits.

Function: Nothing special. It is unable to stand up straight if it is not installed to a wall.

...

Lin Sanjiu was practically accustomed to how useless the stupid card was. She stuffed it into her pocket and hurried towards Apartment 2.

There was still no commotion from the pitch black guardhouse behind her.

When Lin Sanjiu stood outside the front of door 401, she found herself panting like a dog. She used up too much of her physical energy storing that metal gate. Then, a little while ago, she sprinted up four stories. At this moment, Lin Sanjiu could hear her voice quivering as she said, "Zhu... Zhu Mei! Are you in? Open the

door! It's me, Xiao Jiu!"

Apartment 401 was also silent. Lin Sanjiu's heart fell into the pit of her stomach — if Zhu Mei had fainted inside, she really did not know what to do. Since 12 am today, she had already transformed three item: Ren Nan's corpse, her hair, and that metal gate. She could only use her ability one more time, but she had to go through two doors in Zhu Mei's apartment when entering.

Not wanting to give up, Lin Sanjiu continued calling out and knocking on the door. She was feeling very anxious. When she was in the car, she could feel that the temperature was still rising. Even with her heat resistant body, she could tell that it was not only 56°C now. Zhu Mei was just a normal person, could she even survive this...

After shouting for some time, Lin Sanjiu felt her throat burning up, she had no choice but to take a few sips of water. After putting the bottle back into her backpack, she was just about to start knocking on the door again, when the door opened slightly with a creak. "Zhu Mei, how are you?" Lin Sanjiu finally felt relieved as she quickly looked with her flashlight.

However, the person that opened the door was not Zhu Mei. It was a late middle-aged woman with an oval face. She was in her fifties. As the flashlight shined brightly on her face, she quickly blocked it with her hand. Those few seconds was enough for Lin Sanjiu to clearly see her.

Lin Sanjiu's phone fell to the ground with a "pa" sound.

She stared unwaveringly at the face behind that partially opened door and only reacted after some time. She reached for her mobile phone in a fluster. Once again, she held her phone unsteadily as the flashlight shined on the door once more. Finally, Lin Sanjiu managed to find her voice, "Mom?"

She could feel that her mind was in a jumbled mess. "Mom, how... how can you be here? You're alright? What is going on?"

The middle-aged woman looked like she was about to burst into tears. She quickly opened the door, “Come in, quick! It is great to see that you’re okay! I was so worried...”

In a confused state, Lin Sanjiu was pulled into the apartment. She stood at the corridor in the entrance. As a plethora of chaotic thoughts and questions spun in her mind, she did not know what to say. She stood there blankly, scanning the room. She saw the familiar white waist-height shoe cabinet beside her — this was the cabinet that Zhu Mei bought when she was accompanying her.

Suddenly, she asked a question. “Mom, why are you at Zhu Mei’s apartment? Where is she?”

Mother Lin wiped her own tears and pulled a chair over, gesturing for Lin Sanjiu to enter and sit down. After Lin Sanjiu sat down, she explained, between sobs, “Ever since the weather became so abnormal, I have been very worried about you. When I heard that the powergrid had failed here, I rushed over... I could not get you on your phone so I came over to Zhu Mei’s first, just to see if I could meet you if I waited here. But... but I think Zhu Mei is dead...”

Mother Lin sobbed spasmodically and continued, “She was such a good child... I know that both of you were close. Don’t be too upset.” Lin Sanjiu sat motionlessly. She fell silent. She turned off her flashlight. The apartment was once again totally dark.

“I have already prepared myself on the way here... If God decided to take her away, there was nothing I could do about it. Thankfully, you are alright, mom. That’s all I can ask for...” Lin Sanjiu mumbled in the dark.

Even though she knew that her daughter could not see her, Mother Lin nodded. She wiped the tears from her face and smiled. “Your dad is alright too. He is resting in the room. I will just call him over.” She turned around and walked away.

“I’ll go too.” Lin Sanjiu stood up quickly.

Mother Lin nodded her head as she walked, she reached for the bedroom door and said, “Hey—”

She just started her sentence when she heard a swooshing sound coming from behind her. She did not have the time to dodge. “Crash!” Her head was hit, her body turned limped as she fell to the ground. Lin Sanjiu stood behind her.

Lin Sanjiu held the chair above her, she felt that her arms were giving way. She quickly placed the chair down. Even though she placed the chair down, she did not relax the grip the chair. Instead, she gripped the chair tighter. She stared at the direction of the bedroom as if she was about to confront a formidable enemy. For a short moment, it seemed as if she could only hear her own heavy breathing and nothing from the room.

Almost immediately after, there was an abrupt sound of footsteps from behind the bedroom door. The bedroom door was pulled open. A broad shouldered man stood at the door way. He was shocked and angry when he saw what had happened. With the faint light that came from outside, one could see that the man’s facial features were like Lin Sanjiu.

“What are you doing? That’s your mom!” he hollered.

There was a cold expression on the face that was in front of him.

“I wished harder than you that she was my mom.” Lin Sanjiu took a deep breath, she could feel the muscles in her arms and thighs twitching from over-exertion. “My dad and mom died in a car accident ten years ago. Verifying their corpse and arranging for their burial, I did all of that myself. So who are the two of you? And where is my friend?”

Chapter 5: Incoming Crisis

“Oww..” the woman, curled up on the ground, and gave a low moan. It broke the tense atmosphere. “Aghh... that was quite painful.”

Seeing “Mother Lin” standing up, rubbing the back of her head, Lin Sanjiu could even feel the twitching at the corner of her eyes. Things were not going well. Two against one. Apart from the fact that there was a large tall man in the other party, she was so exhausted that her limbs were feeling weak. She did not even have a single ability which she could use to defend herself...

“Mother Lin” stood up straight and cracked her neck. When she turned to face Lin Sanjiu, she had already turned into a young stranger who was about seventeen or eighteen.

“Oh well. What have we done? There are so many people whose parents are still alive, but we had to meet an orphan...” the youth did not even look at Lin Sanjiu, but actually complained to his companion first. “Father Lin” nodded silently as he walked two steps out from the bedroom. After that, “Father Lin” turned into a redhead middle age woman. “Did she manage to hurt you just now?” she asked in fluent Chinese.

The youth grinned showing his set of white teeth, “Of course not, she isn’t that strong.”

Witnessing the two of them talking naturally with each other, acting as though there were nobody else present, Lin Sanjiu felt somewhat bitter. She stealthily edged backward and asked in a trembling voice, “Are both of you also from a New World?”

Her question seemed to have sudden piqued the youth’s interest. “Huh? So you actually know that much? We really underestimated you. That was why you totally showed no mercy just now. Um. I already noticed just now that you have already evolved a little... your potential growth value must be quite high.” The youth’s

manner of speaking was particularly quick and lively. It sounded as though he was talking about his favorite game. If the young man did not trick her into the apartment by disguising as her dead mother, Lin Sanjiu would have really lowered her defenses.

“Is my friend... really dead?”

The youth shrugged in an exaggerated manner. “There is a person in the bathroom. Her dehydration seems really bad, so she was probably trying to get some water. But I think there is a drought here? So anyway, not even a single drop of water came out from the tap. Right... she doesn’t look too good, dead. So I would recommend you not to go over to take a look.”

Her tears poured out uncontrollably. Lin Sanjiu quickly wiped them away as she continued staring at the two people in front of her. She took another step back.

She had already met a person like Ren Nan who was an ‘Posthuman[1]’ from a New World. Unexpectedly, she managed to meet another two of them. Lin Sanjiu could not help feeling extremely wary of them. “If you two did not kill my friend, why are both of you here? Why did you trick me into the apartment?”

The young man spread his arms out and replied, “It is not as if we could choose where we appear when we get here! We are quite lucky that we appeared in a person’s apartment. There is even a bed here for us to rest... Anyway, when we came here, your friend was already dead.”

“Then, why did you disguise yourselves as my parents to trick me? How did you know my parents?” It was obvious that this youth enjoyed talking. He had revealed quite a lot of information in such a short time. Lin Sanjiu noticed that and purposely chose to ask these questions, as she planned the conversation.

It was unclear if she saw through her plans, but before the young man could reply, the redhead woman gestured in an irritated manner for to stop the young man from answering

enthusiastically. "I planned for you to come inside," she said coldly.

With a metallic sound, the redhead woman's nails suddenly grew by half a meter, it shined with a faint luster in the dark. She laughed and said, "I wanted to see how far people in this world have evolved."

Just as redhead woman's nails extended, Lin Sanjiu kicked the chair forward to block the path of the two people. At lightning speed, Lin Sanjiu turned and ran; fortunately, she did not close the door when she entered so she had an escape route.

Without even turning her head once, she sprinted for the stairways exit, skipping steps as she ran down the stairs. She could hear the immediate footsteps behind her; they continued to chase after her. Midway, she could even hear the young man complaining, "She injured me again!"

Next, she could not hear anything at all as a single thought occupied her entire mind: Escape. She felt as if she had used up all the oxygen in her body; her lungs began to hurt with a burning sensation. Each time she took a breath, the boiling hot air scalded her trachea. She was not afraid, but the pain was unavoidable. In addition to that, she was still wounded, and her limbs felt weak. She simply could not run that quickly in this condition. Just when she could see the entrance of the residential complex, she heard a swish sound beside her ear as metallic nails swiped through the air. Gritting her teeth, she did a forward roll. With that, Lin Sanjiu manage to avoid those metallic nails which belonged to the redhead woman behind her.

She rolled a meter forward, turned her head and realized that the pair were about to reach her, just as they reached out towards her...

A piece of white thing was abruptly flung into the air by Lin Sanjiu. With a thought in her mind, two large metal gates

appeared out of nowhere in mid-air. It fell from mid-air with a swoosh of air, falling heavily on the young man as he shrieked. Lin Sanjiu fell to the ground as her legs gave way under her.

The young man could no longer get up, but she did not feel even slightly happy. After all, the redhead lady was the one that posed the largest threat to her, yet she was standing without a scratch at the side of the metal gate!

But, Lin Sanjiu could not run any longer. Each time she transformed a card, it took energy from her. Reverting the metal gate back to its original form had sapped the very last bit of energy that Lin Sanjiu had. Right now, she could not even stand up, so she laid on the ground staring at the redhead woman, feeling extremely bitter.

Unexpected, the redhead woman sighed and did not continue chasing her. She remained where she was and sat down. She frowned and turned back to talk to the youth, "Why are you so stupid?"

The youth who was trapped under the heavy metal gates did not actually seem to be mortally injured. He tried hard to cough out twice, gasped, then retorted, "I am made of real flesh and blood, I am real and corporeal; obviously I can't run as fast as you!" he coughed twice, "I feel terrible... the metal gate is pressing against my windpipe..."

The redhead woman tutted and smiled coldly as she said, "Yeah, you are made of a body of fats. That's why you are so slow. I don't know how you were able to survive till today."

"Well, that is obviously because I have a very high growth potential!"

Lin Sanjiu could not believe her eyes as she saw the two people, who had chased after her, bickering with each other as if they had forgotten about her existence entirely.

“I mean... Aren’t you going to kill me?”

“What?” The young man stuck his head through the metal rails of the metal gates and looked at her with astonishment. “Big Sis, did you think we were trying to kill you? No wonder you ran like crazy. I was yelling at you, but you did not stop... My evolution is already that advanced, why would I bother to kill you. You are like a newly hatched chick. How would that benefit me?”

Looking at the highly evolved person who was stuck under the metal gates, Lin Sanjiu mouth twitched, but she did not say a word. At the same time, she felt her heart falling heavily back into her stomach. It was great that they were not hostile, but....

“Big Sis, please get rid of the metal gates. I am almost flattened by it now.” the young man whined noticing that no one spoke a word.

Lin Sanjiu shot a glance at the redhead woman who was sitting on the ground. She did not know why the woman did not try to help. Hesitating for a moment, she replied coolly, “I can do that, but both of you should introduce yourselves first.”

“Yes, we should. I am Luther. It was nice knowing you. Do you want to shake my hand?” The young man leaned his head against the metal rails. Probably because he spotted Lin Sanjiu rolling her eyes, he quickly laughed and said, “Oh! Yes. This is one of my alternate personalities, she is called Marcie.”

Lin Sanjiu’s eyes widened. “Your other personality?”

“That’s right. Before the New World arrived where I came from, I was the second person on the entire earth that was diagnosed with having a genuine case of Dissociative Identity Disorder.” Luther sounded exceptionally proud when he said this. He tried his best to raise his chin, “After that, I evolved. I could separate Marcie as an individual entity, but we can’t be too far apart... Well, I won’t tell you too much about my abilities. Don’t ask me about how I knew your parents; this is also part of my abilities...” He was

aware that he almost revealed too much and quickly tried to conceal his words saying, “Anyway, in short, Marcie is a biologist. She is very interested in humans who have just evolved, so she was a little too eager just now.”

Lin Sanjiu looked over to Marcie as she nodded with a serious face.

“But she extended her nails...” Lin Sanjiu looked at Marcie’s nails, perplexed. Under her flashlight, those ten fingernails were now back to their normal form, short and rounded.

“She uses them to draw blood. After she draws your blood, she is able to analyze some of your basic stats. This is an ability that Marcie developed herself. It does not actually have any combat value,” Luther replied truthfully.

“Wait, you are saying that not only can you evolve and gain abilities. But even your personalities can do that?” Lin Sanjiu was really shocked. Luther was indeed worthy of the title of Heavenly King of Potential (this was what he called himself). “That means, if you continue evolving, you will become a single person with the power of a whole army?”

“It is not that simple...” Luther said with a difficult expression. “At this moment, my ability is pretty useless. Other than her nails, Marcie can’t even hurt a person right now. Alright. I can’t tell you any more about my power; it is too dangerous. Just let me out from under here. We can talk it through if we have any other misunderstandings.”

Lin Sanjiu exhaled deeply. Perhaps, suddenly seeing her dead parents was too strange that it spooked her. After speaking to Luther, she realized that she did not feel any malice from him or Marcie. She grimaced and admitted, “It is not that I don’t wish to release you from under the metal gates, but I really don’t have the energy right now. I need to rest for a while. Why don’t you tell me more about this thing called New World...”

Just as she finished her sentence, they suddenly hear an odd “Ah gu?” sound coming out from the guardhouse.

Marcie, who had been sitting silent, suddenly jumped up. With a grave look, she whispered, “Damn it.”

[1] The original term can also be interpreted as evolved human. In the context of this novel, the term ‘posthuman’ carries the a better intended meaning of the author.

Chapter 6: Outcome of the First Battle...

Fled

“You are new, so you don’t know this...” Marcie said hurriedly; she was speaking much faster. “To adapt to a New World, two evolutionary pathways exist for humans.”

“Ah Gu?” An almost perplexed-sounding guttural voice came again from the guardhouse.

“You, Luther and me, all belong to the first type of evolution. For those that belong to the second type, we call them ‘duoluozhong’[1].”

Lin Sanjiu raised her head absently. At the moment, she was still unaware what was happening.

While Marcie was rushing to finish her sentences, the door handle illuminated by Lin Sanjiu’s flashlight started to turn slowly. With a “click”, the door opened.

Marcie took a deep breath. “Duoluozhongs will do anything to survive. Since I don’t have any combat abilities at all, we will have to depend on you to defeat the duoluozhong. Otherwise, we will not survive this!” Her words shot out quickly like a machine gun. Just as she finished her sentence, she jumped up to the tree beside them, before Lin Sanjiu could even react.

Lin Sanjiu looked at the spot that Marcie disappeared from, dumbstruck. Then, she looked at Luther who was lying on the ground. Luther smiled at her rather helplessly, showing his sharp bucktooth. “Big Sis, I can’t move anyway... stop looking at me, the duoluozhong is coming out!”

She scrambled with her flashlight before pointing it back to the door of the guardhouse. When Lin Sanjiu’s gaze reached the door, she shoved and swallowed her intended “Don’t call me Big Sis!” reply back into her stomach. She had never seen such a disgusting

thing...

Its wrinkled, viscous-looking dark brown skin clung tightly to its skeleton. At its joints, the excess skin accumulated in layers. It had shrunk to half the size of its original human body — other than its bones and skin, there was not a single piece of flesh on its entire body; it was as if they had all been totally extracted. Above all, the worst thing, which raised goosebumps, was that barely human-like head. The area where its nose and mouth should have been was replaced with a large, long and slender, needle-like instrument which was like a mosquito mouthpiece. As the duoluozhong approached, saliva dripped from that needle-like instrument drop by drop.

The creature, which barely looked human, was still wearing a security guard uniform; however, the uniform was simply too large for its current body, and even before it took two steps, the uniform slid to the ground. Missing its eyelids, its eyeballs turned in their sockets. The duoluozhong locked its gaze on Lin Sanjiu.

“Gu... You’re all so beautiful...”

Unexpectedly, that needle-like instrument similar to a mosquito mouthpiece actually produced a drone of human speech. “Your skins look so supple... they must be so moist...”

Lin Sanjiu froze on the spot. Suddenly, there was a whisper from the ground beside her. “Big Sis, we are all counting on you!”

The voice did not belong to Luther. Lin Sanjiu turned her head and found that it was not a handsome young man that was trapped under the metal gates. Instead, in his place, there was a honest-looking girl who was about ten. She had rosy cheeks and looked like a kid from the countryside.

[Apparently, one of Luther’s ability was shapeshifting. Furthermore, the appearance of his transformation probably depended on his target...] Just as this thought flashed across her mind, Lin Sanjiu scolded back, indignantly, “I’m also injured!” She

quickly took two steps back. As she retreated, Luther was revealed. Under the dim light from the flashlight, his small face showed an expression that was on the brink of tears.

Seeing Luther, the desiccated corpse-like duoluozhong, with a mosquito mouthpart, paused for a moment, visibly.

Lin Sanjiu stealthily shifted her position a little.

“Sis?” the “desiccated corpse” suddenly stepped two steps forward. It scared Lin Sanjiu, and she retreated one meter backward; she was on full alert. Yet, the “desiccated corpse” did not even give her a glance. Its pair of exposed eyeballs stared directly at Luther, “Sis, what are you doing here?”

The “desiccated corpse” was too close. Before it could finish its sentence, the salivary fluid from its mouthpart had already dripped over Luther’s face. It was clear that Luther shuddered for a moment from the disgust, yet he managed to control his expression perfectly, “Brother, I came here to look for you... Help, help me. The weight of the metal gates is hurting me...”

Tears were seeping from the [girl’s] bright eyes, as she continued, “Brother, please lift the metal gates... I want to get up.”

The “desiccated corpse” hesitated for a while, seeming to harbor an unknown thought. It turned a deaf ear to Luther’s plea and sighed in a low voice, “Sis, you shouldn’t have come. You shouldn’t have come...”

Noticing that the “desiccated corpse” in front of her was totally distracted, Lin Sanjiu rushed to the tree where Marcie was on and waved her hands. She gave Marcie a few signals — retreating further and further away as she signaled.

Marcie jumped over to another nearby tree silently. She slid down the tree trunk and hurried over to join Lin Sanjiu. [Fortunately, the monster had retained its rationality and human nature; otherwise, the situation would have been thorny...] This

thought barely appeared in Lin Sanjiu's mind when the "desiccated corpse" suddenly lifted its head and made a series of intense buzzing sounds. Surprisingly, it managed to swing its sharp mouthpart nimbly in the air for a few times; as it did this everything nearby was covered in its saliva.

"But sis, I am very happy!" it continued in an ear-piercing buzzing voice; there was a cheeriness in its tone. "The body fluid from a family member is a great supplement for your brother... I am so happy. I don't even have to go home, and you came here by yourself!"

That chilling sentence nearly scared the souls out of the three of them. No one would have guessed that Luther would suddenly be treated as a defenseless piece of meat. As Luther saw the "desiccated corpse" eagerly lifting its mouthpart, he cried out in fear, "Marcie, save me!"

"Don't!" Before Lin Sanjiu could block her, Marcie had already run past her. Lin Sanjiu was so mad that she stomped her feet before she turned and ran in the opposite direction.

Nevertheless, Marcie had made the right decision. Just when the sharp mouthpart was about to pierce into Luther's chest, she violently hit it with her long metal nails.

The mouthpart was pushed upward while Marcie's nails, which appeared powerful, were smashed into bits and falling all over the ground. It was after all only for drawing blood.

Facing a small obstruction, the exposed eyeballs of the "desiccated corpse" turned toward Marcie. It did not have even the slightest interest in her; instead, it buzzed: "Get lost! False blood and flesh... Sis, I am coming..." When it lowered its head, it paused. "Huh? Who are you? Where is my sister?"

Just like that, within the time of one breath, Luther who was lying on the ground had turned into a skinny, dark-brown and dried-up corpse with a large and long mosquito-like mouthpart.

The two "desiccated corpse" stared at each other for a few seconds.

“Did you absorbed my younger sister?” Perhaps, the "desiccated corpse" was not that intelligent. As it realized that the flesh from its family member it was so close to getting suddenly disappeared, its mouthpart vibrated rapidly in fury, “Gu... Agh... Gu... Agh... I will kill you!”

This time round, it lifted its mouthpart much faster. Just when Marcie was about to block it with her arm, the "desiccated corpse" whirled its mouthpart to one side and pushed her away. She flew backward, landing heavily on the ground nearby.

As he saw the sharp instrument coming down on him again, Luther closed her eyes, quietly preparing himself for his imminent death...

He only heard a loud “Clash!” and with this, the expected stab disappeared. Luther immediately opened his eyes. At that moment, he spotted Lin Sanjiu making an urgent brake, she stopped the car exactly beside the metal gates. At the same time, the "desiccated corpse" was knocked two to three meters away by the Audi.

Lin Sanjiu pushed open the car doors and jumped out. As she placed her hand on the metal gates, she shouted over to Marcie, loudly, “Marcie! Quick! Come over to drive the car!”

The “desiccate corpse” stood up furiously and approached them in large strides. The knock from the car had left it unscathed. Its angry buzzing voice seemed to grow even sharper, but Marcie was one step ahead. Just as Lin Sanjiu got down from the car, she rushed over towards them.

A white light flashed across her palm a few times; Lin Sanjiu’s body dripped with sweat as if she was standing under a showerhead. Her arm trembled more and more, but there was not the slightest hint that the metal gates were disappearing...

Marcie threw herself into the car, she used one of her hand to open the back door of the car and yelled anxiously, "Quick, quick! It's reaching us!"

"Can't you see I'm trying?" It was extremely difficult for Lin Sanjiu to mouth each of the words. Finally, as a white light shined, the metal gates disappeared for two seconds. However, the heavy metal gates instantly reappeared after that and fell heavily to the ground, stirring up a cloud of dirt. "I can't do it!" She panted heavily, almost about to sit down on the ground.

"Get into the car!" Luther's voice rang abruptly from behind her.

It turned out that Luther managed to get out under the gates when it disappeared for a moment. He rushed into the back seat. Just as he turned to look over, he saw the nearby "desiccated corpse" suddenly lunging its mouthpart forward, toward Lin Sanjiu. "Dodge!"

Lin Sanjiu did not even have the time to turn her head, she just quickly pushed herself down to the ground. At the same time, Marcie kicked the car door open with her leg and, once again, it blocked the mouthpart, which hit against the car window, just in time. "Smash!" The windows shattered into a million pieces. Within this split second, Luther had already scrambled over and pulled Lin Sanjiu into the car. He did not even care to close the door, but instead repeatedly said, "Go! Go! Go!"

As she saw the "desiccated corpse" lunging towards them again, Marcie turned the steering wheel vigorously. The car barely brushed past the side of the "desiccated corpse", and they heard an eerie scraping sound...

She hit the accelerator all the way down, and the Audi sped away, leaving the "desiccated corpse" far behind them.

Everyone in the car only managed to calm down and take a breath after the door was closed. Lin Sanjiu's mobile phone had already fallen out at the entrance of the residential complex at

some unknown time. At that moment, Luther and her leaned against the back seat and stared through the rear window. Under the hazy light from the flashlight of her phone, they could see the "desiccated corpse" swaying as it chased after them for a few steps. Seeing the widening distance between them, it finally gave up. Appearing to stop and think for a moment, the "desiccated corpse" turned and walked into the residential complex.

There probably would not be any survivors left in the Rongjun Residential Complex.

“Apparently, the weakness of the duoluozhong here is the slow speed of their movement,” Marcie said as she wiped her sweat and looked into the rearview mirror.

Lin Sanjiu gave the two of them a bottle of water each, from her stash she kept in the car. She, herself, gulped down a half a bottle of water. She sat in a daze not knowing what to say. The events that happened today, in merely a few short hours, simply felt like a dream...

“Thank you,” Luther, who was sitting beside her, said bashfully after drinking two mouthfuls of water. He showed her his bucktooth. “Just now, you could have just run away by yourself. Thanks for risking your life to save me...”

“And it seems like we can really coordinate quite well!” From the rearview mirror, they could see Marcie’s smile as she lifted one of her eyebrows.

She was barely acquainted with them, yet they have already fought alongside each other in a life and death battle. Looking at the two people, Lin Sanjiu smiled faintly for the first time today: “That’s right. So, can we talk about this goddamn world now?”

Translator’s note: [1] “Duoluozhong” can also be translated as fallen/degenerate type.

Chapter 7: This New World

Under Lin Sanjiu directions, Marcie drove all the way to the 38-floor condominium and parked the car in a secluded spot for them to rest. This was a high-end residential estate after all, so there were lesser people compared to the outside. Even in this world that had changed beyond recognition, the garden still looked unusually peaceful now.

Hesitating for a moment, Lin Sanjiu sealed the broken window and switched on the air conditioner. Zhu Mei was no longer around... it made no sense to save that electricity. A cool environment would not only help her recover her strength, it would also be good for that wound on her neck. At least, it would reduce the chances of infection under such high temperatures... Despite how logical her decision was, she could not help feeling somewhat crestfallen as the cool wind started to blow.

Luther noticed her expression. He sighed and comforted, “Big Sis, don’t grieve too much. Your friend... at least your friend did not die at the hands of a duoluozhong...”

After experiencing that near death encounter together, their relationship had unwittingly grown closer. Lin Sanjiu could feel the kindness in Luther’s words and smiled. She only replied after a while, saying, “Can you stop calling me Big Sis? I am really not much older than you... That’s right, I haven’t had the time to introduce myself just now. My name is Lin Sanjiu. Well, I just... just evolved recently.”

“So your name is derived from the phrase, ‘Mortal affairs are discussed merely over three cups of wine’?[1]” Luther immediately pouted. “My name can’t compete with yours. I will call you Xiao Jiu... And, why did you tie a towel around your neck?”

“Oh!” His words reminded Lin Sanjiu. She quickly took off the wet and warm towel exposing the messy, mangled wound. Luther

suddenly drew a breath when he saw it. Marcie raised both her eyebrows, looking puzzledly at Lin Sanjiu. Lin Sanjiu opened a bottle of clean water and started cleaning her wound. As she did this, she recounted the incident with Ren Nan. Largely due to the fact that the two of them had saved her during that previous critical juncture, Lin Sanjiu was very willing to trust them.

Unlike Luther who listened dumbfoundedly, Marcie listened silently with knotted brows. Suddenly, she pointed to the bottle of clean water — Lin Sanjiu paused for a moment — and Marcie offered, "Let me do it. I have studied medical science for a few years." After that, she took a roll of bandage and some antibiotics from her waist pouch.

[Can a personality that had achieved a corporeal body actually have a set of life experience?] Lin Sanjiu shot Luther a look of confusion but did not say anything. She just lifted her head and swallowed the two antibiotics obediently. With Marcie's skills, it did not take long for the wound on her neck to be properly dressed and bandaged.

After listening to her story, Luther was still a little engrossed in the details. "I have heard about such cannibalistic abilities... but Marcie and I have never met someone like that before. I always thought that it was just an urban legend. I can't believe it was actually real. That Ren Nan probably only evolved recently too, that's why you managed to easily get rid of him. Otherwise, if he was given more time, who knows how powerful he would have become!"

"Luckily, we didn't meet such a person," Marcie commented quietly.

After she had spent half a night with them, Lin Sanjiu could tell that even though Marcie was unable to engage in real combat, she was nimble, cool-headed and more... experienced(?); she felt more reliable than Luther.

“Can you explain to me about this world? What is happening? How many worlds are there?” Lin Sanjiu faced Marcie and could not help asking.

“Why are you asking Marcie and not me...” she heard a protest from beside her coming from Luther. As if she did not hear her question, Marcie replied with another question instead, “Have you heard about the theory of parallel dimensions before?”

Lin Sanjiu answered with an “Ah!” before continuing: “Apart from our universe, there is an infinite number of parallel universe. Every measurable behavior, even every single choice that a person made, will create a split, no, will create a new parallel universe?”

She had read many science fiction novels before, so she knew of such a thing.

Marcie nodded with a calm demeanor, saying, “I will just state first that this is just a conjecture. Some posthumans agree, and others disagree. Me? I agree with it. I am not sure how many people there are in your world. In our world, we had a population of 4.3 billion. Every single decision that a person makes in his or her lifetime will create a parallel dimension. If you decided to take the path to the left today, then the alternate dimension will be that you had chose the path to the right... and within that new dimension, everyone will continuously make decisions and create other new dimensions. If we take this into account, who knows how many ‘worlds’ exist? The number is just uncountable.

“Originally, we all lived our lives peacefully in our own dimensions. Within our lifetime, there was no way that we would ever meet someone from another dimension. But for some unknown reason, some of the dimensions started mutating... just like this one.”

While Marcie paused for a while, Lin Sanjiu quickly interjected and asked, “Did they all turned out like this? Do they all have high-temperature climates?”

Luther replied to her with a rare look of seriousness, “Not necessarily. For our world, half the population died due to an epidemic which was caused by a virus outbreak from a laboratory facility.” It suddenly occurred to Lin Sanjiu that he had probably lost his family and friends in his world.

The space in the car fell silent for a few seconds. Marcie broke the silence, and continued, “No one could tell with certainty how many of these dimensions have mutated. The only thing that can be confirmed is that it is not a small number. At that time, we survived the epidemic and evolved. We thought that we only had to strive our best to survive on. But...”

Marcie stopped, she seemed to be deliberating on the best method to explain the situation.

“On the 14th month, Luther and I were already accustomed to the New World which was filled with epidemics and duoluozhong. Misfortune struck on a normal night.”

“When Luther and I woke up, we found ourselves lying in the middle of a battleground. Can you imagine? We had just opened our eyes, we did not even understand where we were, and suddenly a bomb fell just fifty meters away from us...” Marcie added aptly.

“Even though, we were not unable to comprehend what had happened. At the very least, we quickly understood one thing: we were no longer in our original world. We asked around and finally found out that the world was called, ‘A Land dyed black by Blood’. In that world which was governed by wars, we survived miserably for another fourteen months. On the last day of the 14th month, the same thing happened again...” Luther’s voice sounded distant.

Even within the cool air-conditioned interior of the car, a drop of sweat rolled down Lin Sanjiu’s forehead. She understood, and before Luther could say another word, she softly said, “You appeared here.”

Luther sighed and nodded, “Hyperthermal Hell.”

[Hyperthermal Hell!]

Lin Sanjiu opened her mouth, about to say something, when Luther had already guessed what she wanted to ask, “It doesn’t happen only to me. In the two worlds that we have been, all the posthumans that I’ve met were sent away after fourteen months. Furthermore, everyone will go to a different place each time.”

Her heart pounded hard for a few moments. With some doubts, Lin Sanjiu said, “Does that mean, after fourteen months, I will also...”

“Reach another ‘New World’,” Marcie replied confidently. “It is probably because I am just an alternate personality, so I will follow Luther wherever he goes. However, we were separated from all our past companions.”

Waves after waves of unimaginable information flooded Lin Sanjiu’s brain. After she mulled over it for a while, she suddenly realized something. “Wait... you mentioned that every posthuman will be sent to a different world. Does it mean that we are just flung out into an infinite abyss of apocalyptic worlds by pure chance?”

Did this mean that once she left this place, she might not be able to return to this world, where she grew up in, within her lifetime?

No, not only that — it almost meant that once fourteen months have passed, Luther and Marcie will be sent to some unknown world and they might never meet again. She had just met two people that she could trust, yet she was immediately informed that they will separate. It was a weird feeling.

The car’s windows were long covered by a thin film of condensation. It was clear that even within the short time of their conversation, the temperature outside had risen again. Lin Sanjiu turned up the temperature of the air conditioner slightly. As she

was immersed in the silence, she suddenly thought about another possibility. “Wait. From the point of a parallel dimension theory, there is an infinite number of ‘me’. That is to say, I might meet myself in another world?”

Unexpectedly, Marcie shook her head firmly.

“Just like Darwin’s theory of evolution, the theory about parallel dimensions is only the best explanation for these apocalyptic worlds. It is limited to what we know and just a conjecture, it is not actually a fact. But what you’ve just said, it precisely the flaw in this theory. Because in another New World, there will never be another you.”

Lin Sanjiu felt a little overwhelmed. She received too much information for tonight. She could not help leaning back on the seat as her brain was filled with information about everything regarding the New World. She remained silent and in a daze.

Suddenly, she heard a swoosh. She lifted her head and saw that Marcie’s nails had transformed into those long metal nails. Marcie was looking with a hopeful glint in her eyes, “So, can you let me draw your blood now?”

Translator’s note: Sanjiu is literally “three wine” in Chinese. The translated phrase [Mortal affairs are discussed merely over three cups of wine] is not derived from any classical poem, it is a modern saying telling people to take things a little easier as life is fleeting.

Chapter 8: Oh No! It's Dawn.

Among posthumans, there was an unwritten rule that you should not inquire about someone's ability.

As the variety of abilities gained through evolution were extremely unique and unusual, perhaps even beyond people's imaginations, even a single seemingly unremarkable ability might become a trump card to one's survival. Naturally, no one was willing to show their trump cards to others.

Unless it was really necessary, most people abstained from even using their abilities in front of others.

Luther had brought up this point to Lin Sanjiu before — so why did Marcie made such a request? “It is a misunderstanding,” Marcie smiled, probably realizing that her request seemed inappropriate. She wasn't that young in the first place, so when she smiled, a few lines of faint wrinkles appeared on her face. “Considering the current level of my ability, I am unable to tell what active skills you have. I can only analyze some of your basic stats. I think it will be useful for you to know some of your own basic stats as well... This, of course, depends on your decision. Do you want to try?”

“Okay!” Lin Sanjiu replied without any hesitation, stretching her arm out. “I trust the both of you.”

Besides, during their tussle with the duoluozhong, Luther and herself had already exposed many of their abilities to each other. Both of them were not stupid; since she could guess how Luther's abilities work, similarly, Luther would definitely have an inkling of what hers were. It wasn't really necessary to be so secretive.

The hard tips of her metal nails gleamed with a cold metal sheen. It barely touched Lin Sanjiu's arm, and just as if invited, the tip of her nail sunk into Lin Sanjiu's skin. Just when Lin Sanjiu was beginning to feel a slight pain, Marcie had already withdrawn her

nails and was smiling at her, “It’s done.”

She took the single spherical drop of blood and dripped it on her palm. The drop of blood immediately disappeared. Following which, Marcie closed her eyes. When Lin Sanjiu looked at her arm again, she could see that the gash was so minute that it had long clotted.

“Marcie’s ability is quite basic right now, so she will need quite some time to analyze that data...”

Luther explained sounding rather embarrassed. “All active skills will slowly be upgraded over time, you will understand in the future.”

Lin Sanjiu thought about that weird ability of hers. Does that mean that those rubbish cards will be upgraded? What will they become? At the bare minimum, it should allow her to transform items without any limit, right?

As she thought of this, she somehow recalled that she had already “stored” the metal gates twice; even though the second time only lasted for a short two seconds. She wondered if she had used up her quota for today. She needed to find the right time to test it out...

While waiting for Marcie to analyze the data, and out of her own curiosity, Lin Sanjiu started chatting with Luther. Compared to her, he was the more experienced one, having been through two other New Worlds. As he shared his experiences, many of which new and foreign to her, she listened, feeling amazed for one moment, laughing out loud the next, and even felt on the edge during the exciting parts. Luther probably had not spoken so carefreely to someone in a long time. Their relationship improved within only that short span of time.

They were almost done with their conversation. When they looked over to Marcie again, she was still in the same position. Her eyes were fully shut, and she did not make a sound.

“How long does it take for Marcie to analyze the data?” Lin Sanjiu finally asked. “Eh... from what I see, I think she’ll need another one to two hours,” Luther replied appearing slightly embarrassed. “It didn’t take her that long to analyze my stats in the past...”

“That long?” Lin Sanjiu was startled. She immediately leaned over and looked upward to the sky through the car window. At that moment, the color of the black night sky was already visibly lighter, and the horizon in the east was already showing a line of ashen white. As she plopped back into her seat, her face revealed her slight worry.

“What’s wrong? What’s with that face?”

“It’ll be dawn soon,” Lin Sanjiu mumbled, turning to Luther. “It is already that hot at night. Once the sun rises, the car will be directly under the sunlight... what will be the temperature then?”

Luther was momentarily stumped by her question. They looked at each other in dismay. Lin Sanjiu massaged the area between her brows and said a little wearily, “If we stay another two hours here, we will all become roasted ducks.”

Even though there was an adequate amount of electricity and petrol in the car to maintain the air-conditioner for some time, this bit of cool air seemed ever so fragile compared to the vicious assault of heat from the outside environment — and this was only the situation at night. When morning would come, that pitiable air-conditioner in the car would definitely not last against the heat of the scorching sun even if it overworks till it breaks down...

“You are familiar with this place, so do you have any suggestions?” Luther, who had maintained a relaxed look all this while, couldn’t help taking things more seriously right now.

She did have an idea. The most luxurious shopping mall in the city was located near this condominium estate. The building itself was basically useless. The mall was designed with a tall tropical

forest feature in the center, and to create the visual impact of an integrative nature experience, the ceiling was built with transparent reinforced glass. In the past, having the sunlight on your shoulders, while strolling among the greenery was a wonderful experience. In the present context, it was definitely deadly.

However, the basement of the shopping mall was occupied by a huge import supermarket. Aside from providing shelter from the sunlight, there was also a large quantity of food and water...

As Lin Sanjiu described the mall, Luther suddenly became excited: "Supermarket! That's great! You don't know this, but Marcie and I have not eaten any decent human food in over a year! In the previous New World that we were in, we ate hardtack or army rations every day. When the situation was really bad, we had even resorted to chewing on tree barks. My god, I had a bad constipation, my stomach was as hard as a rock..." Lin Sanjiu looked at him with lifted brows. Luther realized that he had said too much and gave an awkward cough: "You're right. We have no idea what the temperature would be like in the morning. We should indeed start planning."

After they discussed quietly for a while, both of them quickly came to a decision: they will first drive to the entrance of the shopping mall, next they will park the car in a shady spot, thereafter Luther will carry Marcie, and they will enter the supermarket together.

The food section took up the largest area in the supermarket. In addition to that, there would also be stock in the warehouse. There should be more than enough ration for three of them. Furthermore, the location of the shopping mall was ideal. If they were lucky, they could even settle down in the supermarket, it could be their main shelter, and they could live there peacefully for a year...

Lin Sanjiu knew that she might be a little over-optimistic, the

actual circumstances probably wouldn't be as ideal. Unfortunately, she could not foresee that even the first step of their plan (driving up to the entrance of the mall), would end up being a practically impossible mission.

The shopping mall was situated in an exceptionally good location, it was just on the main street of the city center. The small district nearby was famous for its nightlife. The lights were lit throughout the night, and it had never-ending traffic. Coincidentally, this month was the shopping mall's 5th year anniversary, so they were opened for 24 hours for the entire month...

As the temperatures soared last night, the first thought that many people had was to head there to seek refuge from the heat. Right now, the main street was crammed with a long queue of cars with loud, rumbling engines. Their car was at the very end of the line. All working cars were, of course, in ignition. As she squinted her eyes and looked toward the direction of the shopping mall, she could somehow see the area around the water fountain at the entrance. It was littered with a dense crowd of people, lying on the ground.

It was probably impossible for them to drive the car over. Lin Sanjiu struck the steering wheel violently and decided to reverse the car. However, in the time that she paused to look at the situation, another car had now appeared in the view of her rear mirror. Their Audi was now trapped in the queue.

“The electrical grid had been down for hours, why are there still people heading in this direction?”

As they were surrounded by a countless number of hot running engines, the flaw of the broken window in their car was made obvious. The miserable bit of cool air from the air-conditioner could not match the savage heat that seeped through the gaps of the makeshift seal on the broken window. Luther's fair skin was gradually turning pink, just like a giant rabbit.

Lin Sanjiu sighed, “They probably wanted to get out of the city... This is the main street. It is linked to a couple of intercity expressways. Let’s just wait, the car behind us would definitely also decide to leave...”

Just within the time span of her two sentences, a few more cars joined the line. The first car of that new group suddenly realized the situation in front. Perhaps the driver was too anxious. Without even any warning, she grabbed her steering wheel and reversed. The car collided with the hood of the car behind it. Thick smoke immediately rose out.

Lin Sanjiu gave a quiet yelp due to the shock before she cursed out with expletives. The car that tried to reverse was a Land Rover. The large vehicle was now in a horizontal position. It had basically blocked off half the road. In addition to that, the car with the damaged hood did not look functional anymore. Now, the way back was totally blocked.

In the distance, a car that just joined the line quickly made a turn and escaped.

Apart from Marcie, who was totally unaware of her surroundings, the two of them in the car sighed. What choice do they have now? They could only abandon the car and continue on foot.

The sky was now a hue of green, just like duck eggs. It certainly wasn’t as bright as being in broad daylight, but it was bright enough for them to see everything.

“How much water do we still have?” Luther licked his dry, chapped lips, feeling uneasy.

Lin Sanjiu looked at her backpack. Actually, she knew even without looking. There was not even a single bottle of mineral water left. She only had three cans of cola, and they were even warm.

Considering the condition of both their bodies, she threw over a can of cola. “There are only three of these. Just drink it quickly! Even if it doesn’t hydrate you, at least you get some sugar. We will probably need quite a lot of energy to get there.”

Unexpectedly, once Luther drank a mouthful, he paused. As he burped, he asked, “What’s this?” Apparently, in his original world, the Coca-Cola Company did not exist. Looking at him smack his lips savoring the last bit of the beverage, Lin Sanjiu finished hers as well. She threw out the empty can and asked, “Are you ready?”

Luther nodded. She took a deep breath, opened the car door and got out. The air which was now several times hotter than before rushed toward them.

Chapter 9: Everything in the Supermarket is Free on Doomsday

It was too hot.

Unless one could experience it himself, the heat was totally beyond imagination. Just as her sweat appeared, it immediately evaporated, then, it was followed by the next bout of hot perspiration. She felt as if her entire body system was struggling to keep her alive, just like an old dog on its deathbed, rapidly panting amidst the blistering hot air.

Comparatively, Luther looked much stronger. Even though he was carrying Marcie, he was definitely doing better than Lin Sanjiu. He noticed it himself, he asked loudly, “Hey... You... body becoming stronger?”

“What?” Lin Sanjiu raised her voice and shouted. The engine sounds around them were too loud. Luther was just on the other side of the car, but she had difficulty hearing him.

“I said...” Luther went around the car and walked toward her. Marcie was taller than him, so while he carried her on his back, her feet were dragging on the ground. “Have you experienced your body becoming stronger?”

She had only said a single word just now, yet Lin Sanjiu could feel that her tongue was totally dry. It was so dry that she could feel the dryness in her larynx. She did not dare to open her mouth again. She only shook her head, hinting to Luther that they should quickly continue walking. Luther’s face showed his surprise, he wanted to say something... but how was this a good time for idle chatter? He quickly nodded his head as they continued traversing through the queue of cars which were spewing hot air.

Lin Sanjiu had to wipe her eyes every few steps. She was sweating too much, her sweat had just entered her eye. The hot stingy

sensation was unbearable. She couldn't refrain from doubting herself. Was there a time limit to the effectiveness of her Heat Resistance Adaptation? Otherwise, what could explain why she didn't feel as hot when they started, yet she was perspiring so profusely right now?

If this went on, could she even reach the supermarket before dying from dehydration?

The two of them looked around in silence. There was a median barrier in the center of the road which separated the two direction flow of the traffic. However, in times of crisis, there were only that many people who could still abide by the traffic code. Currently, the cars were tangled in a messy disarray. Some of the cars were in the right direction, while there were others that were trap against the traffic...

If they had to climb over that barrier, it will not only take a toll on their body, and carrying Marcie was also a problem. Furthermore, they had to continue walking through that burning hot car queue again. That will definitely kill them.

Without even discussing, both of them walked towards the end of the queue.

The person who drove the Land Rover was a skinny woman; when the both of them walked passed, Lin Sanjiu noticed that the driver had fallen over in the car. The driver had sunken eyes and was already unconscious — she was probably already dehydrated and was succumbing to the confusion due to it. She must have crashed her car in that state.

As for the tiny car whose hood had been ruined, it was certain that the air-conditioner in the car was probably unusable now. Miraculously, thanks to the cool air that was retained, the fat middle-aged man in the car was still alive. Ever since the two of them left their car, he had been eyeing them closely.

When Lin Sanjiu walked past the side of his car, the fat man

suddenly faced her direction and rapped on his car window quite a few times.

Honestly speaking, Lin Sanjiu was not a hard-hearted person. However, she felt like she was melting; she did not even know how long she could last. There was no way she could even squeeze an ounce of compassion, so she just looked at the fat man with a frown.

Behind a sheet of glass, the fat man's voice was muffled and unclear: "Outside... hot... can we still walk?"

Lin Sanjiu could roughly guess what he meant. She shook her head indicating that he could not. After that, she continued forward. The hot exhaust that was spewing from the car made the bad situation even more insufferable. She really could not stand not moving away.

As he saw her leaving, the fat man became angry. He pulled open his car door, "I am talking to you. Stop right there! Aren't you walking just fine, I—" Before he could finish his sentence, he abruptly burst into an ear-piercing scream.

That soul-numbing scream was filled with agony, it was even louder than the engines. Lin Sanjiu turned her head quickly. She noticed that a series of blisters have appeared on parts of the fat man's skin which was directly exposed to the exhaust outside.

The scarlet red blisters on his skin burst open. They were all over his face and hands; it was as if he was scalded by hot boiling water. It was a ghastly sight seeing the blisters burst and revealed patches of damaged skin. His painful screams continued. Lin Sanjiu could not take it any longer. She held on to Luther to stabilize herself. She lifted her leg and kicked the man back into his own car. After that, she slammed the door.

All of a sudden, the painful screams quietened. Seeing that the fat man's burns were not worsening, Lin Sanjiu panted then exchanged a panicked look with Luther.

The effectiveness of her ability did not decline after all. The truth was that the external temperature had already reached a terrifying level— it was at the level that a mixture of heated exhaust and the surrounding air was sufficient to cause burns to a normal person...

“Stop thinking about it. Let’s go!” Even the talkative Luther was speaking sparingly.

The two of them walked hurriedly out from the car queue. After they left the hundreds or thousands of running engines, they finally felt a little better. They crossed the road and walked onto the sidewalk which was lined with trees. They did not dare to delay and headed quickly in the direction of the shopping mall.

The leaves on the trees have already lost their green hue. The black, dried, and shrunk leaves were all on the ground under the trees. Every now and then, Lin Sanjiu would see a few motionless people lying on the ground. Every inch of their skin was covered with burns, their body no longer showed any signs of breathing.

No matter how strong she was, this was the first time that Lin Sanjiu saw that many dead people. Feeling somewhat fearful and nauseous, she tried swallowing her own saliva a few times, but her mouth was dry; there was not even a hint of moisture.

“Let’s drink that last can of cola!” Luther’s hoarse voice came from behind her.

Lin Sanjiu considered for a moment before taking the can of cola out. Even though the cola may not be that hydrating, there was more than enough food and water in the supermarket. She saw no point suffering outside and torturing themselves any further. In the past, she could never finish a can of cola in one go, but now she even felt the amount was simply too little. Without caring about the taste, they shared the hot cola and finished the can.

After they had thrown the can away, they walked for a while before the front door of the shopping mall finally gradually appeared clearer and clearer to them.

The fountain which previously never stopped was now so dry that it had cracked open. It was as though no water had ever flowed through it. Nevertheless, the few bodies in the fountain which were facing downwards proved that the fountain was once their last ray of hope. Dead corpses with burnt skins littered the ground creating a grisly scene.

Lin Sanjiu lowered her head, carefully avoiding the corpses on the ground, leaping ahead as she advanced. When she occasionally look up, she found that Luther, though carrying Marcie, had managed to walk ahead of her somehow.

Just as she wondered how he could walk that quickly, she immediately got her answer. As if it didn't bother him, Luther stepped on the back of a body which appeared to belong to a young mother. He strutted forward into the shopping mall as if he was walking on normal ground.

Lin Sanjiu hurried over, and manage to chase after him. She hit his arm angrily, "Can't you have more respect for the dead?" A single sentence made her throat so dry that it hurt.

Luther was startled by her. He looked slightly perplexed for a moment before he reacted, "Oh, oh! That... I'm sorry. I must have seen too many dead bodies. I'm probably somewhat desensitized to that." He looked a little sorry as showed one of his buckteeth. "In the beginning, I was like you."

Seeing that he looked sorry, Lin Sanjiu did not say anything more even though she felt uncomfortable. She changed the subject: "We just have to walk over there, where there is an escalator going down!"

Luther nodded. Next, he scanned the shopping mall and sighed lightly: "This is a really beautiful place..." Without stopping, he followed behind Lin Sanjiu as they headed for the supermarket.

It was reported that the shopping mall was designed by a famous French architect. It was five stories high. There was a hollow in

the center of the mall, and a dense foliage of tropical plants was planted there. Probably due to a stratified structural design, the tropical trees grew up till the position of the 5th story lift. Walking here was as if they were strolling through a primitive forest.

But, this was not the time to admire all that. Lin Sanjiu took a quick glance of the tropical forest, sensing that something was wrong but she could not tell what it was at the moment. She shook her head and rushed down the escalator.

Yet, when they saw the supermarket, both of them could not help gasping.

The situation was worse than what Lin Sanjiu had anticipated. She knew that she would not be the only one that thought of the supermarket. But the situation here was definitely beyond her expectation.

As the temperature soared last night, the supermarket was obviously still operating. It was filled with people. Naturally, all the people were dead now. Their motionless, speechless corpses laid on the floor. The seemingly “frozen” scene captured the chaos that ensued last night. There were empty bottles everywhere. Bottles of mineral water, beverages... There were dried up patches of splashed fruit juice all over the beige floor. The beverage section looked ransacked as the last few bottles of water lay haphazardly on the shelves. Many of the dead bodies on the ground, hugged on tightly to bottles of beverages covered in blood and body fluids.

The most shocking thing was that the death of a cashier was clearly not due to dehydration. There was a deep dent at the back of her head. The cash register in front of her was opened wide, and it was empty inside.

Luther clicked his tongue twice, disapprovingly. “The robber must be feeling stupid right now!”

“That’s if he is still alive.” Lin Sanjiu was extremely thirsty. She grabbed a bottle of water from one of the corpses that was at the

entrance. She drank half the bottle noisily without caring about any taboo, then passed the bottle to Luther.

Even though the supermarket was filled with dead bodies and was in a mess, but at least the food and water left behind should still be sufficient to sustain the three of them. Luther was already feeling very tired after carrying Marcie for the whole journey. He placed her on the floor mumbling, “She doesn’t even have a real flesh and blood, why is she so heavy...”

Lin Sanjiu rested at a cashier counter with no dead bodies. Hearing that, she asked inquisitively, “I wanted to ask earlier... Marcie was around just now, so it wasn’t convenient. When the duoluozhong commented that she was made of false flesh and blood, what does that mean?”

“She is one of my personalities that had taken corporal form, in some sense, she is an independent human being,” Luther explained and drank from the bottle at the same time. “But, the degree of her ‘realness’ is controlled by the strength of my ability... My ability isn’t that great right now, so many aspects of Marcie are not that... umm, lifelike.”

Lin Sanjiu nodded and did not pursue the topic further. After both of them had enough water, they rested for a while. Following which, they felt the uncomfortable hunger pangs from their empty stomachs.

“Let’s take a look at the food section?” Lin Sanjiu suggested.

“Wait,” Luther stopped her. He looked around and asked, “Is there anything around here that we can hold and use as a weapon?”

Chapter 10: Potential Growth Value and a Visitor

“You don’t know this, but a supermarket is a place full of resources, and most mishaps happen in such places...”

Luther and Lin Sanjiu walked carefully along the aisles of dark shelves, watching each other's back every so often. They both held a red wine bottle in one of their hands. They had no choice since that was the only thing near the entrance which could be used as a weapon; the other items were all pretty much useless. A red wine bottle was not a reliable weapon to use against a duoluozhong, but they could at least throw the bottle at it and run.

They had purposely let Marcie lie flat between two dead bodies at the entrance. At first glance, she looked no different from a corpse. They could not tell if she would wake up unhappy, but that was a problem Luther had to deal with...

“Let’s go to the Ready-To-Eat section...” Luther whispered. Just when he wanted to suggest that they should eat starting from the Ready-to-Eat section, he smelled a strong rancid smell. Unwilling to accept this, he reached out to grab a box of potato salad. Just as he held it, he threw it away. “They’re all spoilt! They’re all in this putrid state!”

“Isn’t that obvious?” Lin Sanjiu asked rhetorically, not knowing whether to laugh or cry.

After they had spent at least twenty minutes, the two of them managed to explore the entire supermarket groping around in the dark. Other than the few bodies which were found further inside, nothing else was out of the ordinary. They no longer had to be on alert. Both of them put down the red wine bottles and continued walking. It was tiring to hold a bottle, walking around.

“Even though there is no sunlight, it is really too dark in this

basement supermarket... do you know where we can find some flashlight?" Luther was feeling a little annoyed, "Ever since we came to this Hyperthermal Hell, I have only been in the dark."

"Let's look for it later. I am not sure if they sell it here since this is a high-end import supermarket." As they exchanged conversation, they quickly reached the food section. Each of them grabbed a few packets of food item and carried them in their arms, even though they were unable to read the labels to see what they contained. "I remember that they did sell lavender scented candles... it should be fine as long as we have some light."

As they chatted quietly, Luther managed to open the packet in his hands.

"Oh, these are chips..." he called out being pleasantly surprised. Suddenly, a voice reverberated through the quiet supermarket, "Luther! Come out now!"

It was Marcie's voice.

"Marcie? Marcie, you're awake." Luther heard her voice and quickly pulled Lin Sanjiu along as he ran; they reached the entrance very quickly. Under the light that seeped down from upstairs, he noticed that Marcie was standing in-between two dead bodies, and her face was filled with resentment. Her darkened expression contrasted starkly with that bright red hair of her.

Luther explained himself cheerily and offered the potato chips to her, trying to appease her. Only then did she make a "Humph" and decided to overlook the matter. Subsequently, she turned to look at Lin Sanjiu and hesitated for a moment, not saying a word.

Lin Sanjiu did not know why but she suddenly felt a little anxious. She put down the tidbit she was eating, and asked Marcie, "Is there something wrong with my stats?"

"I wouldn't call that a problem... maybe I haven't collected enough samples." Marcie smiled in a consoling manner: "Your

stats are a little different from those I have collected before.”

“What do you mean?” Lin Sanjiu quickly asked.

“It is not that easy to explain like this. Why don’t you see for yourself?” just as she said this, Marcie’s nails grew out again. Different from before, this time round, there was a faint golden glow on the tips of her nails.

Marcie looked around and found a place that was darker. She signaled for both of them to come to her. Next, using her index finger, she wrote some words in mid-air — each word appeared with a golden glow, floating in mid-air.

Lin Sanjiu tried to suppress her astonishment but with little avail.

“Your stats are on the left,” Marcie explained and continued writing: “I will write down Luther’s stats for you to make some comparisons.”

【Lin Sanjiu’s Passive Skills】

Heat Resistance Adaptation: Able to effectively resist environmental temperatures up to 125°C.

Keen Senses: Not always accurate, but the probability of it being accurate is high.

The third skill is currently being developed.

【Lin Sanjiu’s physical stats】

Height: 168cm

Weight: 56kg

Average timing for 100m dash: 11.6s

Reaction time: Considerably quick

Vision: 5.0

Body fat percentage: 18.5%

Muscle mass percentage: 45.7%

Potential Growth Value: High

When Marcie finished writing, Luther was the first one to exclaim “Huh?”, which made Lin Sanjiu even more nervous. Marcie rolled her eyes at him and continued saying to her, “This are not all your stats. I chose some of the more important categories. I will write down the other information after we made the comparison.”

Lin Sanjiu nodded and read through her own stats quickly.

Since she was young, she had been good at sports, being quite nimble. She did well in the Phys Ed classes that most girls hated, scoring a high score for her college exams. Naturally, she had always been teased by boys with phrases like, “All brawn and no...” Anyway, other than her potential growth value, the numbers seemed normal to her.

Just as Lin Sanjiu was deep in thought, Luther’s stats started to appear in mid-air as well.

【Luther’s Passive Skills】

Extreme Climate Adaptation: Able to survive in climates with extremely high or low temperatures.

Enhanced Condition: Improved physical capabilities.

Optimized Speed: Improved agility.

Eagle Eye: Greatly improved scope of vision and improved night vision.

Parkour: Having cat-like dexterity.

The sixth skill is currently being developed.

【Luther’s physical stats】

Height: 174cm

Weight: 70kg

Speed: 120

Strenght: 89

Max attack: 101

Potential Growth Value: 192

Once Marcie had written down a few categories, Lin Sanjiu understood where she was coming from. Marcie noticed this and stopped writing. “You should be able to tell, right? Luther’s stats are generated conceptually using my ability, and they are like... well, a game character’s.”

Lin Sanjiu nodded. Her eyes lingered many times on the line “Potential Growth Value”.

“I don’t know why but I am unable to conceptually convert your data. It is not to say that it is too impossible, but it is not necessary. All your stats are as they are, you can get this from any physical examination... That’s not all. Most importantly, it is that Potential Growth Value,” Marcie explained calmly.

“Everyone, at least for all the people we’ve met, displayed a fixed number under their Potential Growth Value. Unless they get a rare opportunity, those numbers don’t change... You are the first exception.”

Luther’s “192” was still glowing faintly in mid-air.

Lin Sanjiu frowned, but Marcie continued, “Among Posthumans, Luther’s Potential Growth Value is considerably high. That is to say, you should be about the same level as he is...”

[204.]

Lin Sanjiu lifted her head and exclaimed, “Ren Nan! Ren Nan’s Potential Growth Value was 204! I used my ability on his corpse so I could see a lot of his information... It seems that my stats must be pretty good!”

Luther looked as though he had been punched in the stomach. He

yelled, "How can that guy have a higher potential growth value than me?! That's impossible! I am the Heavenly King of Potential..."

"The Heavenly King of Stupidity suits you better," Marcie sighed faintly, turning to face Lin Sanjiu. "That's right. Do you understand now? Your stats are just too abnormal... I have no explanation for this now."

"It's alright." Lin Sanjiu laughed. Originally, she had no concept of such stats and abilities. Since she knew her stats now, it was different. She thought about it for a moment and set it aside. Just as she planned to tell Marcie to sit and eat with them, Luther suddenly paused and asked, "You said that... you kept Ren Nan's corpse with you?"

"Yeah," Lin Sanjiu answered and dug around in her pocket. She found it empty. She suddenly remembered that she had changed her outfit before leaving. Her Ren Nan card must have been in the pocket of the previous pants she was wearing. "It is in the condominium. What's the matter?"

Luther slapped his thigh, "That's great! We will rest when the sun is out. We should go back later at night and search his body..."

Remembering the weird posture of Ren Nan's corpse, Lin Sanjiu felt a little uneasy. "Search his body?"

Under the faint golden glow of the words, her cat-like amber eyes looked even lighter and brighter.

Luther was looking quite gleeful, "We have to see what he left behind. People like him who have experienced a few worlds would usually bring some valuable stuff around. The items could be very handy."

"Since you killed him, those items also belong to you," Marcie quickly added, as if she was afraid that Lin Sanjiu might misunderstand.

On the contrary, Lin Sanjiu did not really care, she smiled and said, “Okay. We can go back later at night. What do we do now?” As she spoke, she passed the packet of digestive biscuits to Marcie.

Marcie took out two pieces and starting munching, “I think this is quite a good place. We have food and drinks, and there isn’t any sunlight here. We should find some items to light up the place. Then, we could clean up the mess first...” as she said this, she lifted the chin of one of the corpse.

She was right. Even though the air was dry, they could not tell if the bodies would still rot in such high temperature. As the three of them were thirsty and hungry, they cleared through a heap of food like a tornado and drank more water. Luther was the first one to leap up, “Let’s go. Let’s get ourselves some lavender-scented candles!”

As they knew that there were no threats in the supermarket, this time round, they moved much quicker. Without taking much time, the supermarket was lit with the soft glow of candlelights. As the candles burned, a pleasant lavender scent filled the supermarket.

“We have already experienced two worlds. This is the first time we had such a romantic atmosphere,” Luther smiled as he said this to Lin Sanjiu, while he was dragging a dead body by its shoulder jerkily along the ground.

“How can you find this romantic when you are dragging a dead body,” Lin Sanjiu lifted the legs of that dead body, finding his comment rather amusing. “Heavenly King, can you be quicker?”

Both of them carried the body, slowly dragging it up the escalator, step by step. Marcie was standing at the top of the escalator, keeping a watch out. She signaled that it was safe. This was an army gesture that both Luther and herself learned from the previous world. Both of them hurried to the first floor and dumped the body on another heap of corpses.

These people were once alive... Lin Sanjiu felt a little disturbed.

She sighed in her heart and asked, “How many dead bodies are left?”

“Not many. Just two to three corpses which are over in the cosmetic area.” Luther wiped his sweat. His rabbit-like fair skin was now red. As he said this, the three of them climbed down the escalator and headed to the cosmetic section.

“Bang!”

Suddenly, they heard a ramming sound, it reverberated clearly through the supermarket.

Chapter 11: The Person Behind the Door

“What’s that? Didn’t you say that there was nobody else in the supermarket?” Marcie spoke very softly as her body tensed up.

“There was really nobody just now. Who knows where they’ve come in from?” Luther scolded back quietly.

At that moment, the three of them were all holding kitchen knives. The group was led by Luther, followed by Lin Sanjiu, then Marcie, who was keeping a lookout for anything that might come from the side. They headed slowly toward the direction where they heard the collision.

Getting the kitchen knives was Lin Sanjiu’s idea. They managed to find them at the Ready-To-Eat section. Perhaps because they have been used for cutting Lou Mei (braised meat), they were not that sharp—they carried a faint stench of rotten Lou Mei even though they have been wiped. Nevertheless, with the knives, the three of them felt much more confident.

“Bang!” another dull sound rang out through the air.

This time, the three of them recognized immediately the correct direction where the noise came from and headed in the upper left direction. “It’s here!” Marcie pointed.

Not far from them, under the dim light of the candles, they could see a door with the sign “Staff Only”. The three of them looked at each other. Lin Sanjiu nodded and started to speak—it didn’t matter who the person was, a young female voice would certainly always let the other party lower their guard. “Who’s inside? Come out now!”

The air stood still for a few seconds.

After they waited for a while, and just when Lin Sanjiu was about to impatiently ask again, an unmistakable sobbing sound came from behind the door. They heard a bright, timid voice asking,

“Who are you?”

The three of them looked at each other with some astonishment, and feeling slightly relieved, they lowered their kitchen knives. This was not only because they could clearly tell that it was a female voice but also because the voice sounded child-like—the person behind the door was definitely no older than fourteen.

“Hey, little girl? How old are you? We are not bad people...” Lin Sanjiu cautiously followed with a question, “Are you alone behind that door?”

The little girl muttered a “yeah” with a sobbing tone and replied, “I am eleven.”

Hearing this, the three of them placed their kitchen knives down. Marcie even went so far as to grab a towel from one of the shelves and covered them. Almost as if she was afraid to scare the little girl, she asked in a gentle voice, “Why are you here alone? Where are your parents?”

The little girl’s sobbing suddenly intensified: “My, my... dad works here. He brought me here last night. Afterward, many people rushed into the supermarket and started fighting over items, so my dad locked me here and told me not to come out...”

Sympathy flashed across their faces. Needless to say, the little girl’s father must be dead—he might even be one of those dead bodies that they carried outside.

“Little girl, what’s your name? Why don’t you open the door first?” Marcie knocked the door gently.

“My name is Wang Sisi. My dad warned that I should not open the door unless it was for him...” the little girl sobbed again, “but he is not even back now...”

The three of them could not help feeling emotional. She was just a little girl, they did not even know how she managed to survive that night...

“You should also say something. Comfort her,” Luther hinted softly to Lin Sanjiu.

For a split second, Lin Sanjiu had a difficult expression on her face. Marcie who was still speaking softly at the door gave Lin Sanjiu a look of encouragement, so Lin Sanjiu had no choice. She coughed and steeled herself to say, “Wang Sisi, stay strong!” just as these words came out from her mouth, the two others immediately looked at her as if she was some freak.

Lin Sanjiu looked back helpless, showing that it was beyond her. Even though she was a woman, she was raised like a boy since young and was at her wits ends when it came to dealing with children. Furthermore, in such a situation where that child was already so frightened and fragile—it would be considered pretty good if that her “comfort” did not leave any sort of mental trauma.

Faced with Lin Sanjiu’s cold words, Wang Sisi instantly stammered and stopped speaking.

Marcie rolled her eyes at Lin Sanjiu and whispered to the both of them, “The little girl probably already gained Heat Resistance Adaptation. It is not right for her to keep staying inside.” Then, she quickly said, “Sisi, your dad told you not to come out because it wasn’t safe at that time. It is safe right now. Why don’t you come out? We can wait for your father together, okay?”

Wang Sisi, who was behind the door, seemed rather hesitating. She made two sniffing sound as if she was unable to make a decision.

At this point, Marcie, who was now overwhelmed with a sense of maternal instinct, felt her heart melt when she heard the girl’s sniffles. She walked quickly to the door and continued in the gentle voice, “You have been inside since last night, I guess you should be hungry now. Auntie has a lot of food here, what do you like to eat?”

“Well, I am very hungry. I wish I could see the fish that my mom

cooks...” Wang Sisi said timidly, ”and a chocolate bar...”

Tears welled up in Marcie’s eyes, she wiped the corner of her eyes and replied rapidly, “Sure, sure. Let’s open the door. Auntie will bring you to get some food, okay?”

Seeing that she was handling the situation pretty well, the two idle people behind her started to gossip in whispers.

Luther said softly, “Marcie told me that she was married once before. But the two of them could not have children, so it ended in a divorce...”

[No wonder!] Lin Sanjiu was a little fazed when she heard this. [So even a split personality that had taken corporeal form can indeed own a completely different set of life experiences...]

Just when the two of them were chatting idly, Wang Sisi finally agreed to come out under Marcie’s persuasion. “Auntie, I am coming out...” Wang Sisi called out apprehensively. They heard the “click” of the door, and the doorknob turned.

However, the door did not move.

“Huh?” Marcie was surprised. She lowered her head and examined the door, then facing the gap at the door frame, she asked, “Sisi, did you father locked the door from outside when he left?”

The little girl suddenly became panicky and replied, “Yes... I think so. I can’t remember!”

The three of them frowned. As the supermarket’s main target group are high-end consumers, the materials used for the interior construction were all specifically chosen. Hence, even the staff room door was quite thick. Marcie examined the keyhole and yelled determinedly: “Back away, Sisi! Auntie will kick the door down!” Before the other two people could stop her, she already gave the door a forceful kick.

Marcie drew in a breath and immediately sat down on the floor

holding her leg. The door did not even budge a little.

“What should we do?” She turned and looked at the two people behind her feeling slightly helpless.

Lin Sanjiu opened her mouth but finally kept silent. She might be able to “store” the door away. That is if the metal gates didn’t count just now which would mean that she only had one more chance to use that ability. But, it is only seven thirty in the morning right now... Besides, she could not tell for certain if she indeed had one more chance... Lin Sanjiu hesitated for a moment and did not say anything in the end.

After all, there were other methods to open that door. If indeed she could still use that ability one more time—it might be better for everyone if she kept it for something else. “When we were carrying the dead bodies, I noticed that some of them were the staff from the supermarket. They even had their uniforms on,” Luther spoke first after he ruminated for a while. Lin Sanjiu secretly felt a sense of relief and less guilty about it. Luther eyed the entrance of the supermarket, hinting to the two others, “Perhaps, a person lying over might have the key...”

That must be it. Since Wang Sisi’s father locked the door, he must have the key. If his daughter was in the supermarket, he definitely wouldn’t go far. He most likely died in the supermarket and was brought upstairs by them.

Following this flow of logic, the three of them got their spirits up and gathered together to discuss.

As the sunlight outside was very strong now, the temperature must be presumably high. Since Lin Sanjiu’s body had not been “strengthened”, they decided that she will stay behind to guard the staff room door. Before she left, Marcie stressed to Lin Sanjiu with a very worried look: “Don’t say anything you shouldn’t. Don’t scare that kid!”

Lin Sanjiu nodded with a face full of awkwardness.

When the two of them left, the supermarket instantly became quiet again. Wang Sisi seemed to realize that the stiff “stay-strong sister” was the only one left outside. Other than the occasional sob, she did not say a word, so Lin Sanjiu was bored stiff. She started to play with the kitchen knife in her hand as she sat on the floor.

Honestly speaking, now that Luther and Marcie left, this was a good time for her to try out if she still had one last chance to use her ability for today. However, she could not convince herself to make the decision. Other than that slightly smelly kitchen knife in her hand, she did not have anything worth storing. If she wasted her last chance just like that, she would really weep without tears.

She did not know how long she struggled with it and hesitated before she heard the footsteps by the escalator near the entrance. Lin Sanjiu stood up and looked over. It was Luther and Marcie.

“That was fast?” she asked, puzzled.

Luther showed her his two buckteeth and laughed, “We were lucky. The first woman we searched was the manager of the supermarket. I found a bunch of keys in her apron...” after he had said this, he took out and showed Lin Sanjiu, a bunch of clanging keys. “Lucky for us, this manager labeled all her keys. So, this should be easy for us.”

Lin Sanjiu paused for a moment, as she eyed the entrance. “Wang... where is her father? Weren’t you supposed to,” she lowered her voice, “find that from her father’s dead body?”

“Sigh, the main thing is that we have the key. It might not be a bad thing that we could not find... that person.” Luther handed the keys to Marcie casually.

“Sisi, auntie is back. I will help you open the door now,” Marcie said as she squatted down. Just as Marcie slot the key into the keyhole, Lin Sanjiu suddenly felt her heart skipped a beat. When she was finally aware of what she was doing, a white light had already flashed in her palm. The kitchen knife had turned in a

card, and she pinched it tightly in her hand.

Lin Sanjiu looked at the card in her hand with some shock. Before she could regret over her impulsive action, she could hear the sound of the door being unlocked. Next, Marcie gently pushed opened the door and said, “Sisi, auntie already opened the door...”

Just as Marcie took a step forward, Lin Sanjiu suddenly tackled her and pushed her to the ground.

Chapter 12: Living on with Wang Sisi?

In a split second, everything became chaotic.

With Lin Sanjiu's tackle, the skin on Marcie's elbow was scrapped and hurt with a burning sensation. Just as she was about to say, "What the hell are you doing?" she heard Luther yelled out. Luther lifted his knife and rushed into the room, brandishing the knife above Marcie and Lin Sanjiu. "Clash!" a metallic sound rang out. With Luther's attack, the agile thorn-like black shadow that was about to pierce Marcie's face was suddenly sent flying away. Marcie blinked her eyes and only realized then that it was the mouthpart of a duoluozhong.

Lin Sanjiu did a somersault and quickly stood up on her feet. Marcie stood up almost at the same time, feeling a sudden warmth on her face—she touched her face and found that her skin was still cut by the mouthpart and was bleeding.

A few drops of blood fell to the ground leaving a few red splashes.

"Agu... Auntie, can Sisi drink this?" A timid-sounding, soft child-like voice rang out.

The three of them did not move; their faces darkened.

The staff room door was wide open, and a vomit-inducing rotten stench rushed out. A duoluozhong wearing a light pink flowery dress—no one could possibly call that thing a little girl— was standing at the door.

She looked different from the security guard they had seen. Wang Sisi was much smaller than him and was a little plumper. She also had that wrinkly, layered brown skin, but her flowery dress still fitted her well. Unfortunately, there was a large black patch on the chest area of her dress which either came from the mucus that Wang Sisi's body secreted or some person's blood. There were a few sparse strands of thick hair that bore through

that sticky layered skin on her head. They were tied together with an originally pink butterfly bow. That was probably once her ponytail.

She seemed really happy as she held her dress and swayed twice. Her mouthpart produced a “gege” sounding laughter, “Thank you, older brother, older sister, and auntie. Sisi can eat again.”

Just when Lin Sanjiu was about to say something, the girl thrust her nimble, thorn-like mouthpart forward. The three of them jumped backward at the same time, dodging her attack. The mouthpart swept across the floor, and the blood on the ground disappeared.

As the blood entered her mouth, Wang Sisi suddenly made an “ugh” sound. Her mouthpart emitted a furious buzz. “It tastes bad! It tastes bad! I hate this!” Compared to the security guard, her articulation was so much better. If they closed their eyes, it would sound as if she was a normal child throwing a tantrum.

Thereafter, her lidless eyes turned and locked on to Lin Sanjiu. “You’re the older sister just now who isn’t gentle at all.”

Lin Sanjiu could feel the acid churning in her stomach. She suppressed her discomfort and coldly said, “We underestimated you. I didn’t know that a duoluozhong like yourself could possess such intellect...” She was much taller than Wang Sisi and was standing right in front of the staff room door, so she could easily see the entire interior of the room.

There was a work desk behind Wang Sisi, and a dead middle age man was lying flat on it. There was a large bloody hole near his throat, and the stretch was coming from that dead body. Under the high temperature, the dead body was already quite badly decomposed, yet that fear that was plastered on his face was still ever so clear.

At this moment, Luther’s “eagle eyes” came in handy. He scanned the room, and gasped, “Xiao Jiu, Marcie, there is a

nametag on that dead body. His name is Wang Zhiwei.”

Marcie felt a shiver down her spine and gave a quick glance at Lin Sanjiu as she thought of something. Her conjecture was proven the very next second.

“Do you know my dad?” Wang Sisi’s massive eyes rolled around in her black shrunken sockets and almost looked as if they were about to fall out.

“You absorbed your dad—” Before she could finish her sentence, Marcie covered her mouth, as if she was unable to hold back her nausea. She swallowed the remaining words in her sentence with her digestive juice.

Lin Sanjiu quickly understood why Wang Sisi looked a little more hydrated than the security guard. This was because she had consumed the bodily fluid from a person!

“I understand now. Who saw you when you suddenly attacked your father? Was it the manager? She must have been shocked, so she took the opportunity and locked you in this room, right? The door was too well-built, so there was no way a little corpse like you could get out,” Lin Sanjiu said calmly even though all her muscles tensed up preparing for her next action. “When we came here, you heard our voice, so you thought of this method to trick us... I really can’t tell that your dried, shriveled brain can still function so well.”

Angered by her cruel words, Wang Sisi immediately emitted an ear-piercing buzz. She shrieked resentfully, “How great do you think you are, just because you are fully hydrated!” At the same time, she charged at Lin Sanjiu with her mouthpart without any warning.

As Wang Sisi was smaller, her mouthpart was also shorter. Lin Sanjiu was already prepared, so she rolled over to Luther’s side and dodged the first attack. Without even pausing for a second, the girl swung her mouthpart toward the two of them, creating a sharp

sound as it cut through the air.

Luther used his kitchen knife to block the blow hurriedly. With the sound of a clash, the mouthpart was blocked for an instant, but his knife flew out of his hands and landed far away from them. At this moment, they were now both empty handed.

Noting that the situation was bad, Marcie rushed forward with her extended half-meter long nails. She aimed directly for Wang Sisi's eyeballs; however, that mouthpart was really too agile. It recoiled back like a snake, and launched a counterattack, totally destroying Marcie's attack.

Wang Sisi made two clicking sound. It was a pity that her attack landed on that person in front of her, the nasty tasting one. Without waiting for Marcie to look clearly, the mouthpart made a buzz again and once again headed toward Lin Sanjiu.

This time round, Lin Sanjiu did not try to dodge and faced the attack directly. Just when the mouthpart was about to touch her throat, she suddenly grabbed onto the sharp end of the mouthpart. She mustered her energy and pushed the mouthpart a slight distance away from her.

The layers of skin of Wang Sisi face gathered together in that instant, she seemed happy as she said, "HAHA! Idiot. I can draw blood from your hand too!"

Luther and Marcie were shocked. Just as they rushed forward to help, there was a flash of white light. At the very next instant, they heard a sharp screech from Wang Sisi who was shaking her head violently, struggling. Her screech was so loud that items nearly fall off the shelves from the reverberation. A kitchen knife had suddenly appeared out of nowhere and was now embedded in her thorn-like appendage which was originally covered in a sticky fluid. Furthermore, the handle of the knife was in Lin Sanjiu's grip.

Hearing Wang Sisi's screech, Lin Sanjiu smiled viciously as she

held onto the knife handle firmly with both her hands. In this manner, she had managed to secure control over that most dangerous mouthpart. As she held on tightly, she yelled to the other two people, "Luther, kick her back into the room! Marcie, close and lock the door!"

Everything happened at lightning speed. Even though Wang Sisi heard their plan, it was already too late. A dark shadow flew toward her, and a kick landed heavily on her chest—a crackling sound filled the air, almost as if Luther had shattered her ribcage. Lin Sanjiu timed her action well, releasing her grip. The knife which was still stuck on the girl's mouthpart flew backward with the girl who landed far back into the room. Marcie who was standing to the side was long prepared, she rushed forward at that moment and grabbed the door handle.

Just then, a clear mournful girl's voice came out from the room: "Auntie, I know I was wrong. Auntie, please don't lock me up. Boo hoo. I'm in pain. Auntie Marcie, I won't do that again..."

Marcie froze for a moment, but she quickly cursed back in a low voice, "Damn you! I am not your auntie!" She locked the door even before she finished her sentence. The bunch of the key was still hanging from the door. Two turns of the key ensured that the door was once again safely locked.

It was only at this point that Lin Sanjiu finally took a deep breath. She could no longer support her body as she slipped weakly to the ground. With a "gu dong" sound, Luther also lay beside her; with a face of total exhaustion.

Wang Sisi continued with her wailing. Sometimes, she was acting like a pitiful sobbing girl. Sometimes, she targeted Marcie and continued begging and making promises. When that did not work, she shouted furiously with her ear-piercing voice. But no matter how she screamed or rammed the door, the three of them outside acted like they couldn't hear her.

“What should we do?” Luther grimaced as he grabbed a few towels and threw them toward Lin Sanjiu and Marcie. “Does this mean that we will have to settle down here with this duoluozhong?”

Lin Sanjiu could feel her heart pounding. She wiped the blood off her wounded bleeding palm. Then, she finally sighed and said, “Let’s find a few shelves to block off this door... Where else can we stay, other than this place?”

Marcie nodded her head and agreed: “We almost fainted under the heat when we went upstairs to look for the keys...” When she thought of this, she continued sadly, “These duoluozhongs retained their intellect, so how can they bear to attack their loved ones?”

Unfortunately, no one could answer her question.

The three of them drank some water and somewhat rested. Next, they worked together and blocked the staff door entrance with a few shelves and sealed off the door tightly. Each of the shelves was extremely heavy; they even left the useless items on those shelves. This made it even less possible for Wang Sisi, who could not knock down the door, to ever come out.

After they had finished their task, Lin Sanjiu was extremely tired. It had only been five to six hours since she had woken up from the heat in the middle of the night. Yet, her whole world had totally changed. She had never gotten into a fight before, but now she was not above killing a person...

As the supermarket did not sell bedding accessories, Marcie took a large pile of big towels and laid them on the floor, treating them like bedsheets. Lin Sanjiu carefully used half a bottle of water to clean the smelly sweat on her body, before falling asleep on a towel.

They had already pulled down the metal shutter at the entrance of the supermarket and locked it with the key from the dead

manager. The sunlight outside was so strong that it could kill, but inside the supermarket, the darkness allowed for their survival. The three of them slept shoulder to shoulder on a towel, listening to that not-too-distant sharp, helpless wails from Wang Sisi. Gradually, the things around her got blurry, and the noise faded... Lin Sanjiu fell asleep just like that.

Chapter 13: Yet Another Posthuman

Just as if someone had added water to her memories and made some porridge with them, her memories were like a cloudy broth. She could only remember herself lying asleep in her own bed as it gradually became warmer and warmer. She became more and more thirsty... Suddenly, she felt a gentle concern from the man beside her. She grabbed his hand and whispered, "I'm thirsty..."

She suddenly opened her eyes. For a split second, Lin Sanjiu thought that she saw that snow white face again. She exhaled and propped herself up. She shook her head and looked at the surroundings around her with that faint bit of light.

The fancy supermarket, where she occasionally went to get some imported snacks to try, was now dead. It was dark, quiet, and in a mess.

A skinny white caucasian woman had buried her face in her own thick red hair and was sleeping soundly. The fair, handsome young man that was lying beside Marcie opened his eyes a little when he heard Lin Sanjiu's movements.

"You're awake?" Luther, who had just awoken, asked indistinctively. He looked at the clock that hung on the supermarket wall. "Oh! It is already past 6 pm."

Marcie was woken up by both their voices. She rubbed her eyes tiredly and sat up.

"No wonder I feel hungry..." Lin Sanjiu could hear the sound of her digestive juice from her stomach. She drank a mouthful of water and muttered, "That little, dried corpse is finally quiet." Indeed, the area where the staff room was had become quiet. The shelves were still blocking the door, and it was as if there had never been a Wang Sisi. Luther replied, "I will bring some food over." With this, he got up, dragged his feet and yawn a few times as he walked to the food section. He came back with a few vacuum-

packed food like duck feet and chicken drumsticks

After they had woken up, they found that the previously tense, uneasy atmosphere before they slept was almost gone. The three of them sat relaxingly in a circle, eating and chatting at the same time.

“I’d say, you don’t look like someone who has been on a battlefield,” Lin Sanjiu made fun of Luther lightheartedly; she managed to find a packet of her favorite butter cookies.

Hearing this, Marcie snorted, “Don’t bring this up. When we joined the army, I had to train every day. He had it good. Using his ability to transform, he lived quite comfortably...”

“Really, tell me about it!” Lin Sanjiu laughed and continued asking.

He heard the two of them gossiping, but Luther’s mouth was stuffed with food so he simply could not explain himself. He anxiously gulped down a few mouthfuls of water hoping to swallow the food down and nearly choked himself... Suddenly, the rare sounds of laughter rang out in the supermarket. The few of them laughed and joked, and for a moment it seemed like the New World was not that scary after all.

When she heard the laughter, Wang Sisi was pissed. She rammed the door and let out a sharp shriek.

The three of them slept in the morning with that screaming in the background, so they were already accustomed to her existence. They did not even stop to blink but continued eating calmly. Surrounded by the ear-piercing background noise made by Wang Sisi, Luther tutted, “It would be great if we could have some fried vegetables and rice!”

This reminded Lin Sanjiu, she clapped her hands together suddenly, “Aren’t we going to my apartment to search for Ren Nan’s corpse? There is a gas stove in the apartment, it should still

work. Let's bring some rice over. I'm not sure if we are able to fried vegetables but making some pork porridge shouldn't be a problem."

Once she made that suggestion, the two others started to salivate. Luther was the first one to jump up. He pulled Marcie along with him enthusiastically, running around the supermarket. They gathered all the ingredients within a few minutes: Thai rice, mineral water, and vacuum-packed meat...

Disappointingly, they were unable to find a single torchlight in the entire supermarket. The three of them had to compromise by each carrying a lighter for illumination.

After they had rested for a few hours, they figured that it should already be totally dark outside. They carried their items and left the supermarket. Just to be prepared, they even locked the shutters before they left. They climbed up the escalator and found that the sun had already gone down. The hall on the first floor was pitch-dark and without a sign of life.

Unexpectedly, due to the shopping mall's unique structure, the heat from the sun was locked within the building. Without the usual cool air from the air-conditioners, the entire first-floor hall was now like a large high-temperature steamer.

The uncomfortable heat was extremely invasive. The three of them were covered in sweat within seconds. Adding to that was the faint stench from the heap of dead bodies which were exposed to the heat. Lin Sanjiu rushed out of the shopping mall not wanting to stay on the first floor a second longer, only then did she felt a light breeze on her skin.

They had to think of a method to get rid of the dead bodies quickly.

The long queue of cars, which Luther and herself traversed through in the morning, was still in front of the shopping mall. The only thing different from the morning scene was that half the

cars had run out of batteries or gas, becoming silent and lifeless. Occasionally, they saw a few cars with running engines, still struggling on the brink.

The queue of cars was like a dead snake, lying motionlessly under the heat.

Lin Sanjiu led the group and routed past the road. She did not take a single look into any of the cars—she had seen enough dead people. The residential district that she once lived in with Ren Nan was not far from the shopping mall. They took over ten minutes and finally reached the bottom floor of that 38-floor condominium.

Ever since the heat wave came with everyone unprepared, 70% to 80% of the entire human population had been wiped out within a day. Consequently, the overloaded power grid was never repaired. Right now, the three of them had to depend on their legs to climb up the flight of stairs up to the 38th floor.

Being the only male, Luther had no choice but to step up and carry the heavier items like the rice and the bottles of water. He followed behind the two ladies, panting as he climbed up the stairs.

Even though they were so-called “Posthumans”, climbing up 25 floors of stairs was still a little unbearable for them. With her normal, unenhanced physique, Sanjiu was the first one to sit down on the steps. She kept waving her hands saying, “I can’t go on, I can’t go on. Let’s take a rest... Let me catch my breath and drink some water.”

Marcie scanned the surrounding cautiously with the lighter in her hand. Seeing that there was nothing unusual, she passed a bottle of juice to the two exhausted people who were sitting on the steps.

As the refreshingly sweet taste of blueberry juice flowed through his throat, Luther was about to praise the taste of the drink; suddenly, they heard a click from the door on the 26th floor, it opened...

“Is there anyone around? Hubby, is that you?” A trembling woman’s voice, filled with fear, called out. It did not even take them one second before the three of them already jumped up together, fully alert. The lesson they had learned from Wang Sisi was still vivid in their minds. At that instant, without saying anything else, Marcie demanded directly, “Stop where you are! Who are you?”

The 26th floor woman apparently didn’t expect that there were really people in the stairways and uttered a yelp. After that, still sounding nervous, she said, “I... I live here... I came out to look for my husband. Who are you?”

The three of them looked at each other. Lin Sanjiu gave it some thought and raised her voice, “I am also a resident here. Can you walk slowly to the stairs and show us your face?”

“Ahh... What’s that for?” the woman asked but followed her directions and walked out to the stairs. The three of them lifted their heads and looked upward following the light coming from Marcie’s lighter.

Under that orange glow, they saw a normal, clean woman’s face near the handrails of the stairs. She was about over thirty plus years old and was wearing scarlet red pajamas. Her facial features were quite elegant, but her eyes were puffy. She was also visibly terrified. When she saw Lin Sanjiu, the woman finally gave a sigh of relief, “Ah, it’s you. I’ve seen you downstairs before!”

Lin Sanjiu did not have any impression of the lady. Since she was not a duoluozhong, the three of them lowered their guard and headed upstairs.

Seeing Lin Sanjiu’s familiar face, the woman became friendly and hurriedly said, “You might not have noticed me before, but I have met you a couple of times. You go for strolls with your boyfriend frequently. He is tall and very handsome, right?” After she had said this, she looked at the only male, Luther and then at Marcie.

She was evidently quite perplexed but did not ask any questions. She only introduced herself saying, "My surname is Kong, I'm Kong Yun. Have you seen my husband?"

Lin Sanjiu almost couldn't remember when was the last time she saw a normal, living person. She did not want to say a single word regarding Ren Nan. Just as she was about to reply, Luther suddenly quipped, "Big Sister Kong, what does your husband look like? Wasn't he at home with you?"

These words caused Kong Yun's tears to suddenly spill from her eyes, "Last night, we slept at the same time. But there was suddenly a blackout, and I woke up because it was hot. When I had turned to look at my side, my husband was gone... only his pajamas was left on the bed. I am sure he went out, but I don't know where he is... I didn't dare go out in the morning..."

Probably because she had not met another living person for such a long time, it seemed as if she had the intention to pour out all her emotions, "I mean, how did the bloody weather turn so scary? I went downstairs to look for the security guards, but they were all lying on the ground. I don't know if they were all unconscious or dead. I was so... so scared..."

Lin Sanjiu listened to her and nodded in a comforting manner. Suddenly, she felt a tug at the corner of her shirt. She turned and found that Marcie was giving her a look.

Just as Marcie whispered in Lin Sanjiu's ears, Luther stepped forward at the same time, as if he had eyes in the back of his head. He blocked the view of Marcie whispering and prevented Kong Yun from realizing that there was something weird going on.

"Our purpose here is to get to Ren Nan's body. Don't let her follow us. We don't need any more trouble," Marcie whispered.

That was true, observing Kong Yun, it would cause a lot of unnecessary trouble if she spotted the corpse. Lin Sanjiu nodded and said to Kong Yun, "Big Sister Kong, I want to head upstairs to

get some clothes. How about this? You should go back to your apartment to rest, we will look for you again when we head downstairs. Let's see what we can do later, okay?"

Having a familiar face was quite certainly useful, Kong Yun immediately agreed.

"That's right, do you need something to rehydrate yourself?" Lin Sanjiu glanced at her dried lips and reached for that remaining half bottle of juice.

"Uh, I... I... I don't..." Kong Yun suddenly stopped mid-sentence. She fumbled with her words for a while glancing around furtively. "Uh, I meant... Thanks, I will drink a little. Thank you!"

Not only her two of her companions who have been in battlefields but even if Lin Sanjiu who had experienced two brushes with death, were extremely sensitive—seeing that weird reaction from Kong Yun, the three of them could not help staring hard at her.

Chapter 14: Corpse Looting

“Say, what was that with Kong Yun just now?” Lin Sanjiu asked, full of suspicion. Her light footsteps followed her voice as she climbed up the stairs. “When I offered her something to drink, what did her expression change?”

“Who knows?” Luther looked at the items that he was carrying, “Maybe she kept cartons of water in her apartment and was afraid that we would snatch them from her if we found out.”

This was not implausible. Lin Sanjiu tried to recall if she had seen Kong Yun before, but she really had no impression of her. She fell silent for a few seconds listening to their soft footsteps which filled the stairway.

“Anyway, we have to be careful when we visit her later,” Marcie concluded.

They continued their conversation and made a turn. Finally, they saw the large number “38”. “We’re here.” Lin Sanjiu stood at the stairway exit. She inhaled lightly and pulled open the unlocked door. She took a step into the apartment.

The door to the emergency stairway was beside the nanny’s room which opened to a corridor leading to the living room. As they walked into the living room, Luther scanned the room and was the first one to exclaim, “Xiao Jiu, what were you working as in the past? This apartment is huge! Oh, you even have a personal lift in your living room!”

Lin Sanjiu looked around the living room. It was still the same. The exquisite, refined parquet flooring was covered with shattered glass, the sofa was askew, and the floor was a mess. Even that boning knife which she had used to kill Ren Nan was still lying at the same spot. Apparently, no one came here after she left.

“This is not my house,” she replied blandly and kicked the

shattered glass to a side. “Ren Nan tricked me here. This is not his either. He ate the original owner, settled here and took over the place.”

When she mentioned this, she was surprised to find herself rather calm. Watching Lin Sanjiu explaining and entering the bedroom, Luther threw himself into the sofa. He immediately sank into that spacious, soft sofa. He gave a sigh of satisfaction, “Woah... This is really comfortable. This is much better than those towels at the supermarket... why don’t we sleep here for a night?” Marcie jeered.

Lin Sanjiu smiled slightly when she heard the conversation outside. She grabbed her pajamas pants from the bed and dug into the pocket. As expected, she found the 【Ren Nan’s Corpse】 card.

Looking at the crayon drawing on the card, and being in the creepily familiar room, she could not help remembering that snow white face she saw every night—she shivered for a moment and quickly kept the card.

With a little tremble, salt could fall from the clothes that she was wearing now. She should have changed out of it long ago. Lin Sanjiu was unable to imagine how much she perspired over the day. As she changed into a new set of clothes, she felt speechless. She got out two duffel bags and stuffed them with some clothes and shoes suited for exercising.

After she had packed her bag, she came out and saw that the two people were in the kitchen. The packet of rice was opened yet Luther was trying hard to stop Marcie from cooking: “Marcie, it was difficult for us to bring that water and rice up here... No, I’m not implying that your cooking tastes bad. Mainly, well mainly, porridge is too simple a dish for you. It is not worth your vast expertise in cooking...”

Lin Sanjiu laughed softly. The faint feeling of coldness in her heart faded.

Hearing her voice, Luther quickly said, “Oh, Xiao Jiu is here. Let’s look at the dead body before we discuss food. Okay?” Marcie’s face darkened. “Cling!” she left the pot behind as she walked into the living.

“Her cooking sucks.” Luther took the opportunity and gestured behind her back. He mouthed the words to Lin Sanjiu, “Don’t let her cook! Please!”

Lin Sanjiu turn to one side, unable to hold back her laughter. She cleared her throat and asked, “Should I place him here?”

The two others nodded.

After a flash of white light, a black figure fell from Lin Sanjiu’s palm. With a “peng” sound, it fell heavily onto the ground.

The eyes filled with ecstasy, that large mouth which split both cheeks, and that red knife tip that stuck out from that mouth... When she saw that corpse once again after a day had passed, Lin Sanjiu could not help feeling a tremor in her heart; she looked away. Almost immediately, she forced herself to face the corpse again and tried her best to remain composed.

“Sheesh!” Luther drew a breath, “Hey, how can you call him handsome? The standards in your world are really different...”

Before he could finish his sentence, Marcie smacked him. The second half of his sentence was thus smacked back inside.

Lin Sanjiu was too lazy to explain. Feeling a little at loss whether to laugh or cry, she placed her hand on the tip of the knife. After that incident with Wang Sisi, she discovered something. Her ability allowed her to transform up to four items a day and was not limited by four uses a day. It was not yet 12 pm, and since the chef’s knife can be considered a weapon, she stored it away. She held the thought in her mind, a white light briefly flashed past, the knife disappeared into her hands.

The corpse looked considerably better without the murder

weapon.

“I already checked the kitchen, he doesn’t have any sort of bag or container... I lived here for a few months, but I have never seen him carrying a bag around him.” Lin Sanjiu put on a brave face and sat down on the floor. At the corner of her eyes, she could still see that large stiff torn-open mouth.

“This is something you don’t know,” Luther licked his buckteeth and grinned, “Let me give you a lesson!” After saying this, he unexpectedly reached out to undo the collar button of the shirt that the corpse was wearing.

“In the New Worlds, we can sometimes obtain, by chance, some special items which are somewhat more valuable... And, no, don’t show me that kitchen knife. It is not something valuable even if you’ve used it to kill someone.” Luther’s hands nimbly groped the corpse’s neck and chest, with his pair of bright eyes that sparkled from the excitement, he simply looked like a... pervert.

“If you manage to collect a few good items, you must remember this: don’t ever walk around carelessly with the items in your bag... If you meet that sort of unscrupulous person, they might snatch your item. But worst of all, they might plot to kill you for your items.”

Luther did not stop talking, and his hands also continued. Very quickly, he started to search around Ren Nan’s ears. Next, following his fair fingers, Lin Sanjiu gaze fell on an obsidian ear stud. She laughed and said, “This is not a treasure...”

She just started, but Luther had already pulled out the black obsidian ear stud on Ren Nan’s left ear. Before Lin Sanjiu could react, there was a sudden silver glow. “Ding!” The ear stud fell to the ground. However, the silver glow remained in Luther’s hands, it illuminated half the living room.

“What is that?” Lin Sanjiu was stunned, she placed her face closer to his hands. She only realized then that he was holding a

transparent bottle. Within it was a lump of glowing silver fluid which moved continuously.

Luther squinted his eyes due to the glare and read the words: “Ability Polishing Agent... Note: This is not suitable for users at basic levels of evolution...”

Looking at Marcie’s and Luther’s confused faces, she could guess that they had never heard of that [polishing agent] before. Despite that, they could get the general idea of its function from its name. [It probably has something to do with improving or upgrading one’s ability,] Lin Sanjiu thought as she scrutinized the beautiful glowing silver bottle.

Even though the item was not bad, the three of them were not really considered the sort of combatant type. Additionally, they had not evolved much—though Luther would never admit—as a result, they did not really care much for it, they simply placed it aside.

“How strange... this ear stud was my gift to him. How can such a thing be hidden inside?” Lin Sanjiu was puzzled by this and asked Marcie while she looked at Luther who continued with his search.

“All the special items have a very unique property. They can be reduced to their molecular form and later integrated into another item. Of course, one object can only contain one of these special items. When you want to take them out, they can be drawn out in their molecular form and later reconstructed back into their original form. Thus, for safekeeping, everyone usually carries their most valuable items around with them wherever they go.”

Lin Sanjiu was flabbergasted when she heard this, she turned her head blankly and looked at Luther.

Luther was now holding the Patek Philippe watch which Ren Nan wore around wherever he went. As a posthuman, he found his target quickly after tapping a few times on the face of the watch. Almost instantaneously, a black shadow slid out from the watch.

“Pa!” it fell to the ground and rapidly congealed into the shape of a wallet.

Lin Sanjiu opened her mouth in shock as she picked the wallet up. She carefully opened the wallet with an emotion close to reverence.

The wallet was not big, it was only the size of a palm. Unlike the normal wallet, there wasn't a compartment for cash. Rather than calling it a wallet, it was more accurate to call it a card case. After she had searched the card case thoroughly, she found only a single piece of paper in it and nothing else.

Using the ability polishing agent as a light source, Lin Sanjiu drew out the paper.

Without discussion, the three of them gathered together and looked at it.

The first ten seconds that they laid eyes on it, the three of them could not react. They stared at it for another few seconds before Lin Sanjiu suddenly gasped. She could not believe it, and she looked at the other two of them blankly. Consequently, she could not help looking down at the words on the paper once more.

[That's right, there is no mistake...]

Marcie and Luther also realized what it was. Marcie's voice trembled a little, “If I am not wrong, this is...” Suddenly, a “thump” from the direction of the emergency door interrupted her.

Chapter 15: Kong Yun

Almost as soon as they heard the sound, the three of them jumped up.

Without even half a second, Lin Sanjiu turned her palm and was holding the chef's knife as she asked sternly, "Who's that?"

Her cold tone of her voice resonated in the darkness.

"Ah... don't be nervous. It's me. I am Kong Yun from downstairs," there was a reply from the dark corridor in front of the nanny's room. Kong Yun sounded a little tired yet quite seemingly gratified. "That's great. So you guys have flashlights," she said and walked toward them even without an invitation to enter the apartment.

[Flashlight? Where...]

The three of them immediately realized what Kong Yun was talking about and silently cursed about it. The Ability Polishing Agent was really too bright, so much so that Kong Yun could see the light that it emitted even from the emergency door. At this point, they could hear Kong Yun's slow footsteps approaching. In a moment of anxiety, Marcie kicked the Ability Polishing Agent toward the sofa. Just before the little bottle hit the sofa, it disappeared into countless fragments of light and integrated itself into the sofa. The living room suddenly became dark.

"Huh? Why did you switch off the flashlight? I can't see anything..." Kong Yun commented sounding rather dissatisfied.

Lin Sanjiu frowned her brow slightly. She had a sudden inspiration and quickly replied, "That was my mobile phone. It just ran out of battery... Big Sister Kong, didn't we ask you to wait for us in your apartment? Why did you come up?" After a pause, she surfaced her doubts, "So, how did you know that I lived here?"

Taking this opportunity while they talked, she placed her hand

on the leg of the corpse. There was a brief white light, and the floor became empty.

Just as she squished the card into her hand, Kong Yun made her way to the living room, groping in the dark. The very moment she stepped into the living room, Luther lit up his lighter. Under the orange-red glow, Kong Yun looked somewhat pathetic: her face and body were covered in sweat, and her strands of hair were pasted to her forehead. Feeling their gaze, she gave Lin Sanjiu an embarrassed chuckle. “The security guard told me once that you and your boyfriend were the owners of the top floor. Your apartment is situated way too high, I feel very tired after climbing up from the 26th floor...”

Even though she had already evolved, that was not something surprising. Without the strength enhancement, not everyone had as good a physique as Lin Sanjiu. Just after Lin Sanjiu placed the knife down, and with her heart still pinning to look at the paper on the floor, she forced a smile, “Big Sister Kong, why did you come up?”

“Nothing really.” Kong Yun looked a little hard-pressed. “I was alone in my apartment, and my husband is still missing. I just felt frightened...”

This wasn’t something incomprehensible. The three of them looked at each other, and Luther suddenly gave Kong Yun a grin, showing his set of white teeth, “Big Sister Kong, it’s great that you are here. It saved us the trouble of going downstairs to get you. You see, we brought some rice here so that we could cook a bit of porridge... Do you want to eat some?”

Lin Sanjiu clapped silently in her heart— that was a brilliant excuse! Otherwise, the scene of them standing randomly in the middle of the living room did feel rather unnatural.

Kong Yun was visibly distracted as she looked at the sack of rice, then she began to laugh, “Why not? Even though that rice is not

suitable to make porridge, but that's a good idea. You all should rest, let me cook."

"Okay, let me help." Marcie carried the sack of rice and headed to the kitchen.

Kong Yun could not help being curious about Marcie. She quickly followed behind her asking, "Your Mandarin is really good, where are you from?"

After seeing the two of them chatting, entering the kitchen, starting to make preparation for cooking the porridge, Luther finally handed a hard piece of something calmly to Lin Sanjiu. It turned out that he managed to retrieve the paper on the ground at some time.

"So, this is..." Lin Sanjiu was just about to say something when the young man interrupted her.

"Let's discuss this when we go back."

"Go back? You mean you are not planning to bring her to the supermarket?" Lin Sanjiu reacted quickly.

He seemed to have said that instinctively, without thinking much about it. Hearing her words, he frowned showing a conflicted look. Indeed, not bringing Kong Yun and leaving her, a recently evolved, almost powerless person outside seemed rather unkind. On the other hand, since they did not share any life-and-death situation with her, they could not trust her, so it did not seem appropriate to bring her back to the supermarket either.

"Let's observe first. Maybe, she has her own plans, so we don't have to help her make that decision," Lin Sanjiu comforted Luther after seeing his somewhat hilarious scrunched up face.

Kong Yun probably cooked often at home. The lack of light did not hinder her nimble movement—she diced the vacuum-packed salt water chicken, added some seasoning and boiled them with the porridge for half an hour. Soon, the air was filled with a fragrant

aroma.

Not having eaten a normal meal in more than a year, Luther's mouth quickly filled up with saliva.

"Come, it is ready!"

After placing the pot of porridge on the dining table, Marcie searched for a few sets of utensils and scooped out four bowls of porridge.

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The porridge from the pot was steaming, the snow white rice shimmered as they reflected the light from the lighter. The few of them blew on their porridge and prodded it with their spoons. At long last, they could start eating, they impatiently scooped up a spoonful of porridge.

Even though the porridge was hot, it wasn't uncomfortable for them to eat it—a pleasant warmth filled their stomachs as the sweet salty aftertaste of the chicken porridge remained on their tongues. Counting the time that had passed, Lin Sanjiu had actually eaten a more delicious salmon just 24 hours before. But somehow, this meal of chicken porridge she was having, after her world was destroyed, tasted like something a lifetime ago.

Marcie ate a mouthful of porridge and asked Kong Yun coolly, "How did you pass the time alone yesterday?"

As Luther wanted to eat, he had set aside his lighter before that. Since it was dark, they could not see Kong Yun's actual expression clearly. They only heard her saying, rather wistfully, "After waking up last night, I kept searching for my husband. Calls were not going through, and the security guards have all fainted. I went out, drove for a couple of rounds and met many people just wandering and stumbling around the streets like mad men. It scared me, so I immediately went home. I bore with it until morning when it was really too hot, so I hid in my washroom and

fell asleep... I don't even know how's my husband right now."

"Well... Did you discover anything about yourself that was different than before?" Lin Sanjiu could not resist asking.

"Ahh, ah? Different than before... I didn't. What are your referring to?" Kong Yun seemed astonished as she knocked her spoon against her bowl.

[Maybe, her Active Skills have not been developed.] Lin Sanjiu thought it through. If they were to explain to her about New Worlds, Posthumans and that sort of thing, it would be more convincing after Kong Yun developed Active Skills. Consequently, she smiled, "It's nothing. It is a long story, we will tell you some other time. Anyway, what plans do you have later?"

Kong Yun immediately replied without a shred of hesitation, "I will go back home to wait for my husband, I will wait for him until he returns. If he comes back and doesn't see me, he will be anxious. That's right, let's eat a little faster. I want to show you my husband's photo later. If you meet him outside, please remember to tell him to go home to look for me..."

From her words, she did not seem aware that if she waited on, without food and water, she would only die in the end. Perhaps, it wasn't that she was unaware, but rather because she was willing to take the risk—even if there will only a thin thread of hope.

The atmosphere at the dining table suddenly became heavy. After quite awhile, Lin Sanjiu finally said, "Okay, if you are running low on food. We will bring some up for you."

She did not want to shatter the woman's only pillar of support so quickly. Losing one's hope was akin to the cruel climate outside, it was similarly fatal to a person. Kong Yun thanked her gratefully. They finished the small pot of porridge very quickly. After Kong Yun's explanation, the three of them gathered their things and followed her downstairs.

There were two households on each subsequent floor after the penthouse. As the other apartment on the 26th floor had always been empty, Kong Yun left her door unlocked when she left. It simply opened when she just gave it a push.

When the three of them entered her apartment, they were suddenly stunned.

At that moment, the apartment which was elegantly decorated was very bright. There were many stylish candelabra all over the large and small surfaces in the room such as the dining table, coffee table, and flower stand. Each of the candelabra held several cream-colored candles. The lights from the orange flames and a faint fragrance flooded the entire living room. It was like as beautiful as a dreamscape— and was scorchingly hot like a nightmare.

Surrounded by the candlelight, Kong Yun smiled bashfully as tears welled up in her eyes. “My husband bought these candles for our wedding anniversary. When I came home that day, the apartment was filled with candles. He even cooked for me...” her voice was caught in her throat. She gathered her hair and searched for a few photo frames as if nothing had happened.

“After the anniversary, he wanted to throw away the candles. I vehemently disagreed. And look, now it came handy.” Kong Yun sniffled as she tearfully passed Lin Sanjiu a photo.

The man in the photo was average-looking; his smile was very gentle, and his teeth were white. “Ah!” Lin Sanjiu exclaimed before she said, “I have the impression that I met your husband before, just once downstairs.”

Lin Sanjiu explained that she remembered him because, at that time, there was an extremely furious woman over the line with him. The woman screamed about something continuously and was so loud that she could be heard even over the phone.

After Lin Sanjiu had said this, Kong Yun’s tears poured down

uncontrollably. “We had a quarrel that day... I really regret it... If I knew that we will part, I would never shout at him. He is a such a gentle person...”

Marcie tapped lightly on Kong Yun’s shoulder and sighed. Luther sat silently on a chair, just like any men, he did not know what to do when it comes to crying women. After saying a few comforting words to Kong Yun, Lin Sanjiu stood up, and her eyes swept the apartment aimlessly. Suddenly, she frowned feeling a little suspicious. Looking carefully, there was something weird about the apartment.

The water dispenser in the living room was empty, but there was a full bottle of water right beside it. It was as if the owner did not find it necessary to refill the water dispenser. The owner might not be thirsty, yet the fish tank was empty. There were only a layer of ornamental rocks and a dry, tiny treasure chest in it. When she walked over, there was still a strong fishy smell. The weirdest thing were the potted plants in the apartment, or rather, just pots filled with soil that should have plants in them. The plants were all missing, and there were holes in the soil where they once were, she could even see a few strands of roots... A sudden flash of thought ran through her mind.

“I’ll get a drink for you. Do you have any drinks in your fridge?” Lin Sanjiu hurried to the fridge before she asked Kong Yun abruptly. Before she even received a reply, she pulled opened the fridge door.

The fridge compartments were almost empty, there were only a few plastic wraps scattered about—those which were used in supermarkets to wrap vegetables, one even had the price tag on: Premium Organic carrots, \$14.98. At the left compartment of the fridge, there was a neat row of drinks. Lin Sanjiu was certain from one look, the drinks have never been touched by anyone.

Only at that moment did she hear Kong Yun’s slightly anxious voice coming from behind her, “No, it’s okay. I am not thirsty.

Thank you.” Lin Sanjiu closed the fridge door and turned to look at the hand that Marcie had placed on Kong Yun. She felt like there was a heavy rock in the pit of her stomach.

Chapter 16: We Found Your Husband

“Marcie,” Lin Sanjiu controlled her facial muscles and tried her best to sound amiable, “can you come over here? I want to ask if you have seen my little silver bottle.”

Bringing up that little silver bottle, Marcie immediately thought of the Ability Polishing Agent. Marcie did not move from the spot, she was baffled and just replied, “I placed it on the sofa, didn’t I?” As she said this, she was still patting Kong Yun’s back.

As they left with Kong Yun, they had no choice but to leave the Ability Polishing Agent upstairs. Lin Sanjiu also knew about that.

Lin Sanjiu suddenly knitted her brows, “Agh, I’ve forgotten!” She turned to face Kong Yun, saying, “Blame it all on my bad memory! Can I bring the both of them upstairs with me? Older Sister Kong, is it okay if you wait here for a moment?”

Kong Yun was stunned for a moment.

Lin Sanjiu knew that she, herself, was acting quite abnormally, so she did not give Kong Yun even the chance to reply. She pulled Luther to the entrance and gestured for Marcie to follow, “Come, we can also see if there are other useful supplies.”

Marcie still had a doubtful look, but she stood up and complied.

“Older Sister Kong, don’t be afraid. We will come back here soon...” Lin Sanjiu said with a smile and pulled open the front door.

Through the little opening before the door closed, Lin Sanjiu saw Kong Yun sitting in the living room, looking back at her expressionlessly. When the front door closed with a bang, her face was enveloped by the darkness.

Just as the door was closed shut, Lin Sanjiu turned and sprinted upstairs; the two others were confused but followed her quickly. Luther was the first one to react, he murmured, “What’s the

matter? Did you find something amiss?”

“I hope... I hope that I over analyzed it!” her words came out in bits as she vigorously climbed up the stairs with wide strides. “I must go upstairs to confirm something first...”

Within a few minutes, the three of them used their full stamina to reached the top floor. Lin Sanjiu’s heart pounded hard, without taking any time to steady her breathing, she pushed opened the door and rushed into the 38th floor apartment.

The room was pitch dark. “Give me the lighter!” Lin Sanjiu shouted. Hearing her, Luther threw over the lighter and with a “click”, she lit it in her hand. The orange light from the flame lit half the dining area dimly. There were four bowls on the dining table.

Luther and Marcie looked at each other and could not help looking at the area that Lin Sanjiu had illuminated.

“Huh?” Marcie spotted the oddity quicker than Luther, “Why didn’t she...”

Previously, they ate in the dark and left immediately, so no one realized anything strange. Now that they looked carefully, they discovered that there was something wrong. There were messy piles of chicken bones and skins beside three of the bowls. But beside Kong Yun’s bowl, there was nothing.

[Well this is nothing new, maybe she likes to eat chicken bones...] Just as Luther was about to say this, he saw Lin Sanjiu serious expression as she brought Kong Yun’s bowl closer to them. He scanned it and immediately swallowed his words.

In this scathingly hot Hyperthermal Hell, even Posthumans like themselves were constantly in a state of mild dehydration. This was the reason that they had to appropriately drink water every now and then. Even though they had decided to settle down at the supermarket, each drop of water was extremely precious to them.

Naturally, they drank up all the porridge soup before.

However, there was still half a bowl of shimmering white broth in Kong Yun's bowl. When she checked with a spoon, Lin Sanjiu found that there wasn't a single grain of rice left and all the chicken had also been eaten. Only the most precious thing in this New World, water, was left totally untouched by Kong Yun.

"Why... why doesn't she need to drink?" Luther frowned as he bit his lip so tightly that there was a mark. Lin Sanjiu had a grim expression.

Thanks to her [Keen Senses], she managed to piece the random fragments of clues together. But if her intuition was right, Kong Yun was a thornier problem than any duoluozhong.

Lin Sanjiu said each word quietly, "She lied. She definitely already developed one Active Skill... and the way things are, I roughly know what her ability is."

[The chicken meat, the rice, the plants, the goldfishes and the vegetables in the fridge...]

After she had placed the bowl down, her gaze fell on both Luther's and Marcie's faces. She said with some seriousness, "It is very likely that Kong Yun's ability is that she can convert all forms of biological material into the nutrients that she needs for survival. I guess that she only has to touch her target and she can rapidly absorb it entirely without a single trace. How much time did we spend eating? Yet, it now seems as if the chicken and rice never even existed in the first place!"

With a "Sss" sound, Marcie gasped. "All forms of biological material? Absorption by contact? This... this isn't just an ability for survival. If it is used in combat..."

One would die if they were touched.

"But that doesn't explain why she doesn't have to drink water." Luther's face turned white as he recalled how they bumped into

each other when they were going downstairs.

“Could it be that her ability altered her body, so she is unable to intake water like us? Maybe, for her, she can only obtain the required nutrients and fluids from the absorption of biological materials.” Marcie suggested. “We had spent almost half a day with her... If she had any ill will, we wouldn’t be alive now.”

Lin Sanjiu nodded her head. This was what she thought of and hope for as well. But she feared...

The thought just came to her mind but before she had the time to express herself, Kong Yun’s voice rang out in the darkness: “Why do you need such a long time to just grab something?”

The three of them froze. [Did they take that long?] Lin Sanjiu could not help looking at the time on her digital watch.

They spent only ten minutes from the time they came upstairs. She could not tell what Kong Yun’s purpose was for following them so closely.

Noticing that the two others were silent and just standing blankly, Marcie quickly raised her voice and called over, “Wait for us at the door. We will come out soon.”

Kong Yun replied with an “Oh.” but she continued walking toward them as if she did not hear Marcie. She slowly dragged her feet and stepped into the apartment. The atmosphere suddenly became awkward.

Pausing for two seconds, Marcie laughed, “Hey, we are leaving now, you didn’t have to come in...”

Kong Yun said softly, “I am scared to be on my own. I just want to be with you guys, will you mind?” While she said this, she walked closer to the three of them and revealed a smile. She stretched out her hand and held onto Marcie’s arm.

Lin Sanjiu’s heart leaped. Just when she was about to intervene, Luther, who was standing behind her, had already pulled Marcie

away from Kong Yun with one quick movement. He was so fast that she could only see a dark shadow.

Marcie only managed to steady herself when Luther growled out, “What do you want!” His anger made his voice tremble a little. This was the first time Lin Sanjiu witnessed that fair, handsome young man getting angry. “You already developed your abilities long before, right? We already know this! Tell us! Why are you following us?”

“Ah...” Kong Yun seemed slightly startled. She could not react for a moment. After a while, she said, sounding troubled, “There is really something wrong with my body... I did not dare to tell all of you because I was afraid that you will be scared of me. So all of you actually knew...”

Marcie looked at her, guardedly. Trying to get a confirmation, she asked cautiously, “You... didn’t mean us any harm, right?”

Lin Sanjiu instantly shot her a look. Marcie was nice and everything, but she could be too trusting sometimes. If Kong Yun really planned something, would she honestly say that out?

“Harm all of you?” Kong Yun paused, the words she said next was beyond Lin Sanjiu’s expectation: “No, no, no. I just need one of you. It will be too cruel to absorb all three of you.”

The sentence was like a “stop” button, and everything froze.

Seeing their shocked face seemed to have hardened Kong Yun’s heart. She sighed and continued, “Actually, I really don’t want to absorb any living being. But I feel weak. I have absorbed everything in my house and even those security guards downstairs... but I still feel weak, so weak that it is uncomfortable...”

Lin Sanjiu could not decide if she should be angry or she should laugh.

Probably because she saw Lin Sanjiu’s expression, Kong Yun

wiped her own tears, “When I first saw all of you, I did not have that intention. But as time went on, I couldn’t resist... Ask yourselves truthfully, if taking another person’s life mean that you can survive, would you do it?” She did not actually plan to listen to their answers and instead lifted one finger. She said, almost as if pleading, “I will just absorb one of you... Really! Just one!”

“Marcie, Luther, didn’t both of you just met her yesterday? She is just a passing acquaintance...” There was an almost deranged smile on her face. “Without this girl, both of you can go on living your lives the way you wanted to, it wouldn’t be a loss.”

“You really did plan this out well for us.” Lin Sanjiu smiled coldly without looking at Luther’s and Marcie’s expressions. She only felt a brewing fire of anger in her heart.

Hearing this, Kong Yun turned to look at her, “Lady, I don’t see your boyfriend beside you. I figured both of you were just playing around, you won’t understand the feelings between my husband and me... I must not die. Even if everyone dies, I must not die. I will wait for my husband at home...”

Luther could not stand listening to her anymore and retorted, “Enough of your bullsh*t! If you want to eat someone, go back home and eat yourself!”

Lin Sanjiu felt a sense of relief, and she quickly smiled at the two of them.

When she was about to face Kong Yun again, her eyes stopped at her own bedroom door. In the dark, the door seemed so black as if it was a part of the entire universe; behind the door, was a double bed.

Instantaneously, a flash of thought pierced through her mind. Before Lin Sanjiu was aware, she already asked the question: “Kong Yun, you mentioned that when you woke up last night, only his pajamas was left on the bed?”

“Yes, why did...” Kong Yun did not finish her sentence, and her face immediately turned as white as a sheet when she saw Lin Sanjiu’s expression.

Lin Sanjiu smiled vengefully showing her white teeth, she stared at Kong Yun’s face, “Bingo! We found your husband!”

Chapter 17: Hot on the Heels

Just as if someone had added water to her memories and made some porridge with them, her memories were like a cloudy broth. She could only remember herself lying asleep in her own bed as it gradually became warmer and warmer. She became more and more thirsty... Suddenly, she felt a gentle concern from the man beside her. She grabbed his hand and whispered, “I’m thirsty...”

“Just about then, you unconsciously activated your ability, in that daze you unwittingly absorbed your husband. When you became clear-headed, obviously only his pajamas was left behind...” Lin Sanjiu’s cold voice reverberated in the dark room.

Toward the woman who was now sitting on the floor, Lin Sanjiu dreaded and feared her ability. [How powerful is her ability? In that short time that she was in a daze, she actually managed to absorb an entire full-grown man? She did not even leave a strand of hair!]

Kong Yun stared blankly into the air, she had a weird expression, she looked as though she was about to cry or laugh. Just as her expression turned malevolent as she managed a “Ha.” but her tears fell anyway, “Nonsense! What do you know! You only said that because you don’t want me to absorb you! So you’re spouting nonsense!”

“Really? Then, let me ask you a question. When you woke up, did you still feel thirsty?” Lin Sanjiu challenged softly.

This sentence was the last straw which broke the camel’s back. It totally devastated Kong Yun. Suddenly, Kong Yun let out a shrill cry. The others were so shocked that they could not help retreating backward. Thereafter, she buried her face in her arms and curled up on the ground. She rocked her body gently as if she was comforting herself as she started crying loudly.

“I... I don’t know!” Kong Yun screamed and cried at the same

time. Her face was covered in tears, and her words were muffled and unclear. “Everyone said that I was too good for him. But in fact, he was too good for me... too good! He was such a nice person... such a nice...” Her cries sounded like fabric being torn, it was filled with deep wrath and pain, so much so that one could not help feeling fearful and uneasy when they heard it.

“Why are you still just standing there?”

Suddenly, she felt her arm being pulled. She turned her head to find that it was Marcie. Marcie whispered, “Let’s take this chance to get away! Do you want to wait for her to regain her composure and absorb you?”

Lin Sanjiu only regain her senses then. It turned out that Luther, with a tensed look on his face, had pressed his body against the soft and already crept step by step out of the living room. When he saw that the two of them were still standing at the same stop, he was seriously mad at them, he hurried mouthed, “Are you two stupid?”

The two of them hastened their steps and slipped past Kong Yun. The latter seemed to have forgotten where she was, while she wailed heedless to the things around her, her ten fingers dug deep into the sofa. She made several deep holes in the sofa’s soft material and was absolutely ignorant to the movements of the people near her.

Just like that, under the sound of her anguished cries, the few of them escaped quietly and sprinted downstairs. After heart-stoppingly nervous situation, their trip back to the supermarket was a contrastingly less eventual journey. They jogged all the way back to the road in front of the shopping mall. They swiftly moved through the queue of cars, walking speedily between the cars.

The scurry of footsteps woke up the dying people who were in their cars. When their group walked past the cars, quite a few people in the cars managed to sit up, pounding powerlessly on their car windows in despair. Even though they were alive, their

expressions were not different from the dead, without a single spark of life.

Lin Sanjiu looked at them with sympathy. Within the ten over arms behind those car windows, she wondered how many of them could survive until they successfully evolved...

“Wait!” Luther who had been leading them suddenly stopped. He turned to instruct Marcie, “Keep a lookout on the road, make sure that Kong Yun is not following us. Xiao Jiu, hand me your knife.”

With a white flash, Lin Sanjiu handed him her chef’s knife and asked puzzledly, “What’s wrong?”

Luther tilted his head to the white Volkswagen Bora, his face stiffened, “Look at that, that person is going to change into a duoluozhong soon.”

Following where Luther gestured to, Lin Sanjiu felt a layer of goosebumps rising. A dark brown face was pressing tightly against the windscreen of the Volkswagen Bora; it was impossible to tell its gender. Most of its moisture had already evaporated, leaving only a layer of wrinkly skin which piled at the two sides of its cheek. Its mouth area was protruding out as if a mouthpart would burst through its skin any moment. One of its eyelids had already fallen off, and the other eyelid swayed as it hanged down precariously over one of its eyeballs

The pair of white eyeballs were staring motionlessly at the three of them.

Holding his breath, Luther cautiously walked toward the side of the car. The eyeballs within the car also swirled to look at his side.

“Crash!” with a shattering sound, the car window by the driver’s seat was smashed in. Following shortly, even before the person in the car could react, Luther struck and thrust the knife into the brain of that half-man half-duoluozhong. The process was as quick as lightning, and before Lin Sanjiu even had the time to respond,

she heard a rasping, guttural sound and the body in the car slipped back wearily into the seat.

After he casually cleaned the knife on the shirt of the corpse, he walked back and returned Lin Sanjiu her knife. Seeing her frowning conflicted face, Luther could only sigh, “I know that it is uncomfortable for you but we can’t just leave it like that, right?”

Lin Sanjiu nodded her head and kept the knife.

Even though that person still had the visage of a human figure, it was obvious that the person could not be saved. Apparently, she had better try to get used to such a scene in the future. While Lin Sanjiu continued forward with her wide strides again, she tried to stomach the waves of disgust that she felt—it was quite different from killing in self-defense after all.

They did not know if Kong Yun was too overwhelmed by grief, but she appeared not to chase after them. The three of them ran into the supermarket, shocked but unharmed, and they quickly pulled down the metal shutter. Only after they locked the shutter from inside, did Lin Sanjiu slid to the ground leaning on the shutter, exhaling a deep breath.

Marcie grabbed a few bottles of water and handed out a bottle to each of them. She took out the Ability Polishing Agent that she did manage to retrieve previously and placed it on one of the shelves beside them, using it for lighting. Who would have known? It was much stronger than the candles. A corner of the supermarket was lit up as if there was a fluorescent light there.

After resting for few minutes, Lin Sanjiu’s mind could not help drifting back to the piece of paper. “So, the item that we found just now...” As she said this, she pulled out the piece of paper. Suddenly, the two remaining people also focused their concentration on that piece of paper.

The handwriting on the paper could clearly be seen under the silver light. As what she saw was too mind-blowing, Lin Sanjiu

inadvertently crushed the sides of the paper.

【VISA】

Place of issue: Black Death City

Valid Destination: Hyperthermal Hell

Valid From: Six months prior to the descent of Hyperthermal Hell

This visa was issued by the Consular Officer of Black Death City.

Despite looking at it once before, Lin Sanjiu was still dumbfounded. She passed the visa over to Luther and Marcie. Both of them were also filled with perplexity.

“I don’t understand... when we came here, we did not have any visa, but we could enter this place anyway?” Luther muttered several times repetitively. He flipped over the visa multiple times, examining it.

“If we think it through carefully, your situation was different from his.” Lin Sanjiu paused, seemingly to think. “You had to wait for a full fourteen months before you could enter another mutated dimension, but when Ren Nan came here to my world, it was still normal— its mutation had not even started...”

[Apparently, a visa could not only assign a destination, but it could also allow a person to travel to a dimension before it mutates?]

Marcie pointed at the line “Journey Performed” at the back of the visa. She explained softly, “Ren Nan definitely came here with this visa.”

“Both of you have never heard anything about such a thing like this visa?” Lin Sanjiu pressed on with her questions unrelentingly even though it seemed hopeless.

Both of them shook their heads as expected. Luther laid the visa on the ground, staring at it, saying bitterly, “If we knew there was

such a thing, we wouldn't have to wake up to an exploding bomb the previous time."

[That made sense.] Lin Sanjiu lowered her head, her heart was filled with an incomprehensible feeling.

"If we first ignore how that man with the surname Ren got the visa, just imagine the advantages of entering a dimension six months before!" Luther clicked his tongue, speaking to Lin Sanjiu, "You can start making all sorts of preparation when it is still peaceful. Be it supplies, or body training... Your chance of survival will far exceed the original inhabitants of that world."

[That's true...]

"But I think that this sort of visa is much more useful for Ren Nan... No matter how well we prepare, we cannot guarantee that everything will work out. However, with his ability, he could gain a lot more potential growth value in the six months." As she thought about the past disorienting half a year, a cold self-deprecating smile appeared on Lin Sanjiu's face.

Luther sighed and patted Lin Sanjiu's shoulder to show his comfort in a seemingly matured manner.

"I wonder how he got the visa. Even if we wanted to find out, there is no one we can ask." Marcie was still fiddling with the paper obstinately.

"He doesn't have many items, so I don't think he had been to many places..." Luther's eyes suddenly brightened, and he said, smiling, "If we can find the Consular Officer of Hyperthermal Hell, maybe we can survive together, we don't have to split up when we get transported to another world."

Struggling through the infinite number of apocalyptic world, everyone comes and goes like drifting duckweed on water. This is indeed a troubling matter. It was a rare opportunity to meet someone that one can share a good rapport with, if they can

become companions, it can't get any better!

The problem they had was finding the Consular Officer. All three of them had this same thought. Lin Sanjiu was just about to speak when they heard a neither light nor heavy knock on the door.

“You all must be inside, right? Why don't you open the door?” Kong Yun still had that nasally hoarse voice that one has after bawling, but her tone was a lot calmer.

Chapter 18: A Happy Blessing for Lin Sanjiu

The three of them did not say a single a word. They stood up silently as they raised their guard. Kong Yun's question echoed softly through the spacious supermarket, and before it faded, there was another furious knock. This time, she even raised her voice, "Come here and open the door! I know you all are in there! That rice, didn't you get that here? Open up!"

That's right—she lived nearby, so she probably shopped here frequently. That was the reason she was able to recognize the source of that sack of imported rice. Before the three of them could think of anything to reply to her, they did not expect that her shouting successfully managed to rouse Wang Sisi who was in the staff room. After an ear-piercing hiss, bangs resonated in the air as she slammed herself violently against the door. Lin Sanjiu could not tolerate this any longer, she suddenly walked towards the metal shutter.

Somehow, Wang Sisi's voice seemed to have startled Kong Yun. There were a few seconds of silence outside the metal shutter. After waiting for a while, Lin Sanjiu restrained her anger and asked, "What the hell do you want?"

"Is that the lady from upstairs?" Kong Yun shot back.

"Why did you follow us here? What do want?" Lin Sanjiu shouted loudly, "Do you think I will just obediently let myself be absorbed by you, just like your husband?"

Kong Yun, who stood at the other side of the shutter, fell silent for a moment. After her pause, her faint voice finally traveled through the metal shutter, "I actually just want to talk. Honestly, I have to thank you."

Lin Sanjiu bit her lip without saying a word.

"If you had not enlightened me, I would have just continue

waiting. Without anyone around for me to absorb, I would die in the end. On the other hand... I really hate you,” Kong Yun sounded unstable, the volume of her voice fluctuated greatly, it was difficult to listen to her. “My hope was ripped away from me by a young woman like you who knew nothing... I am suffering, really. Who are you to tell me that I killed him? I can’t stand it! I...I really want to kill you so that I can feel a little better.”

Lin Sanjiu was stunned. She could not help taking half a step back. Even though there was a metal shutter between them, she could almost smell the abnormal aura of insanity in the air.

Kong Yun, on the side, began to speak again, “Forget it. You wouldn’t understand... It doesn’t make a difference whether you open the shutter or not. If you don’t open the shutter, I will just converse with you... If you open them, I will turn your bones into juice and drink that.”

Lin Sanjiu was so affected that her face turned white, she was about to open her mouth, but Kong Yun continued as if she knew that the person on the other side was about to respond, “Listen carefully, I will only say this once. I can only use my ability every once in an hour. For me, a living organism is more beneficial than a dead one. And a human being is by far more beneficial for me than any other living creature. When I am absorbing, my... prey and I must not move in that ten minutes. Whether it is on my own violation or forced, if I move, all my efforts will be wasted. I will have to wait for the next hour to start absorbing again. But now at my initial stage, I need to absorb a large amount, so I can’t risk the situation of not absorbing anything for a few hours...”

[From this perspective, it meant that Kong Yun was only trying to drag time after she ate the chicken porridge...]

“Ah!” Marcie suddenly exclaimed, realizing something, “That was why you did not lay a hand on us just now. It is not that you didn’t want to, but you did not have the chance! If the others realized that something was wrong, you would have exposed

yourself and waste another hour!”

Once she said this, Luther softly but clearly swore a string of vulgarities.

“That’s right,” Even though she could not see Kong Yun face, Lin Sanjiu did not know why but she felt that Kong Yun was smiling at this point, “originally, I wanted to wait for one of you to fall behind... but I did not expect things to turn out like this...”

“How generous of you to reveal everything about your ability,” Lin Sanjiu remarked sarcastically with a cold smile, but only half believed her words.

“So what if I told you this? The worst outcome is that I’ll die,” Kong Yun intonation rose, “Do you think I am afraid of death? If you kill me, I will meet my husband. I should be thanking you then.”

Lin Sanjiu was shocked, she was about to speak when Wang Sisi who was in the staff room behind her started howling again.

The inhuman howl sounded very intimidating, it became silent for a moment outside the metal shutter, before Kong Yun spoke again. “What’s that?”

“It’s nothing,” Lin Sanjiu did not want to tell Kong Yun anything about duoluo zhongs, “Probably, someone dying soon...”

Despite knowing that she was lying, Kong Yun still laughed. “Fine, let’s hope that we never meet again.”

She was surprisingly blunt. After she had said that, they could hear her footsteps changing direction. She climbed the escalator, and gradually, her footsteps faded into the distance. Lin Sanjiu tried her best to steel herself just now, but after she had heard that woman leave, she finally gave a sigh of relief.

The three of them walked back to the area where they had laid out the towels. Lin Sanjiu wiped her face then laid on her “bed” lethargically. Wang Sisi’s howling continued, but the three of

them seemed to have gotten used to it. After they had discussed for a while about Kong Yun, somehow Marcie and Luther came to the subject on logistics. The two of them discussed for a short moment before deciding to gather the remaining food and water so that they could check the numbers.

“Both of you, go ahead.” Lin Sanjiu’s heart and body were weary. She did not feel like moving at all, she waved her hands saying, “Let me be lazy for a while.”

“Don’t worry. That woman can’t do anything to you.” Marcie thought that she was still concerned about Kong Yun, so she smiled and patted her head. After that, she stood up and left with Luther.

The Ability Polishing Agent glowed brightly in the tiny bottle, and the surroundings were lit up with a swirling silver light. If Wang Sisi’s banging and howling didn’t spoil that atmosphere, it was actually considerably peaceful.

After laying for a while, Lin Sanjiu found that her mind was crowded with a lot of thing—Ren Nan, the New World, her own abilities, her dead parents, Zhu Mei, Kong Yun... these things floating in her mind, one after the other, almost suffocating her. If she had discovered this earlier, she would rather find something to do. Lin Sanjiu tossed around a few times before she finally jumped up frustratedly. She decided to look for the other two people and help check their inventory of supplies.

To her surprise, once she left the ground, she felt a warm flow traveling from her head to her feet. In that split second, Lin Sanjiu felt all her muscles twitching, her blood rushing through her blood vessels like crazy, and her teeth even started to chatter. She had never experienced this before; it was strange as though she had lost control of her body. A low cry escaped her throat uncontrollably.

Coincidentally, Wang Sisi had stopped at that moment. Her voice immediately traveled through the supermarket. Almost

immediately, Marcie hastily asked, “What’s wrong?”

Lin Sanjiu wanted to open her mouth to say something, but she totally could not control her muscles and her tongue. Her ears were only filled with the sound of her teeth which chattered rapidly.

“We’ll go over!” Luther yelled out.

The footsteps of the two of them approaching sounded very distant and indistinct to Lin Sanjiu. She only felt Marcie’s cold breath when the two of them were kneeling beside her. “What... what’s the matter?”

Luther sounded very anxious, “Her... her face. No, her whole body. What’s happening?”

At that moment, Lin Sanjiu was just like a large piece of human-shaped jelly, she was trembling non-stop under some sort of external force. Her skin, hair, and muscle vibrated like water ripples. After almost a full minute, this weird vibration gradually faded away. Her body slowly calmed down.

When Lin Sanjiu opened her eyes, she saw two large faces, looking very closely at her with worried expressions.

“What... what happened to me just now?” she pinched her own skin bewilderedly. The tight, delicate skin which belonged to a young woman like herself looked so normal. Her muscles, bones, and blood also reverted back.

Luther and Marcie looked at each other, feeling a little at a loss.

“Let me draw your blood; I will help you check,” Marcie said as she extended her nails and gave Lin Sanjiu a tiny scratch. Lin Sanjiu had the same idea. She looked nervously as her second drop of fresh blood disappeared into Marcie’s palms. Maybe it was because she already collected some base figures, so they only had to wait nervously for about 20 minutes before Marcie opened her eyes. She looked at Lin Sanjiu, and her lips curled up. A few

smiling crow's feet appeared at the corner of her eyes, "Xiao Jiu, congratulation, you have a happy blessing![1]"

With a "Pshhh!" sound, Luther, who was standing beside, drinking a bottle of water, spurted water out from his mouth, wetting Lin Sanjiu's hair and face.

Lin Sanjiu vision darkened, her face was totally white. She did not even bother to wipe the drops of water on her eyelashes, "That's not possible!"

"Why not? This is the natural order of thing." As she was puzzled, Marcie's smile somewhat faded. She looked at both Luther and Lin Sanjiu, "Isn't it a happy blessing now that she has developed her third passive skill?"

She could not understand when she saw the jaw-dropping expression that the two of them had. "And her third Passive Skill is a high-tiered physical enhancement ability. Hey, what are you doing... Wait.. Wait... Luther, why aren't you stopping her? Hey! It hurts!"

Translator notes: [1]The author use a bit of wordplay, the term in Chinese roughly translates to "fortunate event" which can mean that one is pregnant or something happy has happened.

Chapter 19: Who Moved my Corpse Mountain?

The tangerine yellow sun rays were already shining down on the last two steps of the escalator. The strong sunlight was like an eraser, it erased all the darkness from the spaces and revealed the original color of every object. As the sunlight reached her light amber eyes, Lin Sanjiu narrowed her eyes slightly—surviving in the dark for 48 hours, she could not really adapt to the sudden presence of sunlight.

Aside from the brightness, the surrounding temperature was unmistakably rising rapidly. The heat wave engulfed Lin Sanjiu as though it was going to eat her up alive, for a moment, she almost felt as if her blood was starting to boil. If she had not suddenly attained her【Overall Physical Enhancement】passive skill last night, there was a high possibility that she would not survive the way back.

It was said that such an ability would modify one's body to a large extent, Lin Sanjiu was beginning to slightly believe that now.

She blinked her eyes a few times, trying her best get accustomed to the high definition vision that her third ability provided. On the ground, not too far from them, she saw the fully detailed splatters of sepia blood stains, dirt stains, putrid pus and chunks of flesh.

She had just knitted her brows together, not having enough time to process the feeling of disgust, when he suddenly realized the implication of the scene in front of her. Lin Sanjiu's eyes widened instantly, she exchanged looks with Luther who standing beside her. The two of them took a deep breath simultaneously.

Today, they came up to clear away the corpses. Since yesterday, the pile of corpses which was just by the escalator had started to give off this funky stench. It was akin to having a rotting cadaver on one's doorstep. If there were a sudden outbreak of contagion

due to this, they wouldn't be spared even with their enhanced bodies. That was why Lin Sanjiu decided to come upstairs to burn the heap of corpses under the glaring heat of the sun.

Yet, now the two of them found themselves a little confounded—the bloodstains and chunks of flesh were undeniable there, but those were the only remnants left at that spot which once housed that mountain of corpses.

“Those... bodies?” Luther muttered as he walked a few steps forward, not noticing that the soles of his shoes were now in a dirty, smelly puddle of fluid. “Don't tell me... Kong Yun absorbed all the dead bodies here last night?”

Even though Kong Yun mentioned that living organisms were more beneficial to her than dead ones, but who knows if she was swayed when she saw that readily-available pile of corpses and absorbed them all.

Lin Sanjiu scanned the area a few times as her face got whiter and whiter. She whispered, “It's not her.”

“Huh? How can you be sure?”

“There are a few reasons. Firstly, there were no less than twenty to thirty dead bodies here, it has only been over ten hours from the time she appeared here last night till this morning... she doesn't have enough time. Secondly, she can absorb the corpses entirely but what about their clothes? Where are all the clothes on those bodies?” Lin Sanjiu forced herself to calm down, restraining herself from looking at the streets outside.

From the large glass doors of the shopping mall, it was easy to see the same car queue that jammed up the road in front of it. “Thirdly, take a look outside.”

Luther squinted his eyes and looked into the cars in the queue using his Eagle Eyes. He figured out what Lin Sanjiu meant almost immediately. Last night, when they walked through the lines of

cars, there were still quite a few people banging on their car windows, requesting for their help to reach here. But now, the cars were all empty, there wasn't even a single person left. Some of the car windows have been shattered, and some others had their doors opened. At a glance, Luther noticed a gray men's shirt and a pair of jeans on the road, one of its sleeves was folded upwards while the other downwards. It was as though the owner froze on the spot when he was still wearing that shirt. Luther had an impression of that outfit. Last night, they were still worn by a young man with a fashionable hairstyle.

They overlooked this indeed. A whole street packed full with cars, and there was at least a single living person in most of the cars. To Kong Yun, this must be no different from an all-you-can-eat buffet! Luther shuddered for a moment. Even if he had seen a countless number of dead bodies, he could not help feeling creeped out by it.

Lin Sanjiu scolded a vulgarity, uncharacteristically. "I really didn't see that coming, she was actually so... One live person per hour, she actually had the heart to do this!"

"Let's go out later to see if there are any other survivors. We can decide what we should do then... Otherwise, if we just leave them outside, I am worried that Kong Yun might come here again tonight," Lin Sanjiu said vexingly. After responding with a sigh, Luther frowned and took his glance away from the scene. He tried not to think about how Kong Yun tricked each of the drivers or passengers in the car one by one to open their doors and forced himself to focus on the strange phenomenon in front of him.

"That's weird. If it wasn't the work of Kong Yun, where did the dead bodies go?"

"I don't know too." Lin Sanjiu had an unpleasant look on her face. She paced around the area but couldn't find anything.

"Who will waste their time and energy to move those corpse

away for nothing?” Luther followed her and paced around. Just as he was about to ask Marcie to come upstairs to take a look, he heard a squeak under his feet. He suddenly lost his balance. In his panic, he tried to maintain his balance in a fluster, but his feet were too slippery. With a “Pak!” sound, his whole body fell on the puddle of foul blood. He immediately groaned in disgust.

The “culprit” which caused his fall slid away into the distance — Lin Sanjiu gave it a sweeping glance and felt her gastric acid churning inside her — was a human eyeball which had been half-smashed by Luther. Luther saw that as well. He quickly stood up from that rancid smelling puddle of blood and started coughing, shaking his arms and stomping his feet. From the way he reacted, he must have been totally grossed out.

“Come on, come on! Stop it. Let’s go downstairs and see if we can find some wet wipes so that you clean up yourself...” Lin Sanjiu said as she avoided Luther while walking.

When she walked to the escalator, she turned back to look at Luther who was shaking his head like a dog with wet fur. She could not help scolding in a teasing manner: “What the use of shaking like that? Let’s just go back... huh?”

The latter half of her sentence stopped as if she stepped on the brakes of a car, she stood motionless, seemingly startled. Luther, who was almost soaked in corpses’ fluid, couldn’t help taking notice of her sudden peculiar behavior, “What’s wrong? What are you doing?”

Lin Sanjiu did not say a word. She lifted her finger pointing to a distance, upward. Perplexed, Luther followed the trajectory of her finger, still unable to figure out what was wrong.

The rays of the sun seeped down like melted gold from the high glass ceiling on the top floor. A white reflection covered the floor tiles, the green leaves of the plants and the gold-plated door handles of various shops, just like echoes of the sunlight. Items

made of plastic melted in the day and hardened overnight, forming a collection of odd sculptures. At first glance, it was just like a modern art museum.

If it wasn't for the murderous temperature, the scenery was considerable fascinating—yet what was wrong with it?

After looking at it once more, he suddenly exclaimed, "Ah!" He only realized it now, his face was suddenly filled with awe, "Why is it totally unharmed?"

The "it" refers to the five stories high tropical forest featured in the center of the shopping mall. Even if those were tropical plants, there wasn't a single plant in the world that could tolerate such high temperatures which could even melt plastic. Despite that, the small swathe of tropical forest in front of them was still dense, green and full of vitality as if the Hyperthermal Hell was just an illusion. It formed a juxtaposition to the trees on the walkway, separated by the glass walls.

Each of the tree trunks of the ornamental trees outside was like charcoal, black and dry. All their leaves had fallen to the ground, they gathered in a black patch, and it was almost impossible to tell their original form. Some of the trees on the walkway even broke into two because their thin trucks became too dry and brittle to support their weight.

Contrasting the two, Lin Sanjiu even thought that the tropical plants in the shopping mall looked even healthier than before.

Encountering these two weird phenomena one after the other, they really could not come out with any explanation in such a situation. Lin Sanjiu thought for awhile and said to Luther, "These plants are really quite a mystery... That's right, why don't we call Marcie up to look at this? Three heads are better than two!"

"Fine! Sigh, I don't find it that strange." Luther did not care much for the few green plants in front of him. "Maybe, the glass is special, so it blocks whatever UVA or something like that."

“Even so, we shouldn’t take it lightly.”

“Sure, sure. But can I change out of my clothes first? It is so uncomfortable.” Obviously, Luther’s focus was still on the smelly fluid that was on him. It was simply too easy for him to change his clothes since the shopping mall lacked no branded stores. Luther looked around for a while, and smiled at Lin Sanjiu asking, “Do you think I should go for Armani or DG?”

Lin Sanjiu could not stand it any longer, “I hope that as you can still run as quickly wearing an s-sized suit.”

“Fine, I know...” Luther gave a look of resignation, saying that as he climbed up the staircase. Lin Sanjiu did not want to stay in the area where the corpses mysteriously disappeared, so she followed quickly, “Wait for me!”

Luther stopped in the middle of the staircase turning to laugh, “Why? Do you want to look for a few outfits as well? I wanted to say this a long time ago, why is a beautiful lady like you wearing clothes like you are going to practice T’ai-chi?”

“Why does it have to be T’ai-ch—”

Before she could finish her question, a strong gust of wind followed a long, dark shadow as it attacked the two of them on the staircase at lightning speed.

Chapter 20: Lin Sanjiu's Roundabout Tactics

No one could anticipate this attack. Since that gust of wind was about to reach the top of Luther's head, and he did not have the time to defend himself, he could only roll to the ground. Somehow, he managed to dodge the attack but could not avoid tumbling down the staircase.

Luckily, Lin Sanjiu reacted quickly, she stooped down and grabbed his sleeve stopping Luther's momentum down the stairs. The attack, which had missed Luther, slammed into the top of the staircase and actually destroyed a segment of the stairs, stirring up a cloud of dust and broken concrete which sent Lin Sanjiu and Luther into a fit of coughing. Witnessing that, they were a little traumatized—if the attack landed on a person, it would have shaved off half his life!

Missing its attack, the black shadow lingered in the air, swaying lightly up and down as if undecided on which prey, underneath, it should attack. Taking advantage of that short frame of time, the two of them finally saw the perpetrator clearly, ultimately solving the riddle about the whereabouts of the mountain of corpses.

It was a long, green vine which extended from the tropical forest.

No, instead of calling that green, it was closer to a sepia brown. The green vines which spanned over half the shopping mall's central hall were covered with so much blood stains that it was basically impossible to tell their original color. There were even a few pieces of orange fabrics dangling on the thorns of the vines, and with one sweeping look, Lin Sanjiu was certain that the fabric matched that of the staff uniform for the supermarket downstairs.

“What the f*ck! How can those things extend so far?” Luther touched the abrasion on his face, cursing angrily. Lin Sanjiu locked her eyes on the green vines, not daring to make any rash

movements, “It probably grew after it mutated... what should we do now?”

“What else? Let’s run back! I don’t believe that it can follow us all the way back to the supermarket!”

The green vine seemed like it had understood what was said, “Hu!” and generated another strong gust of wind. Following which, the few broken slabs of concrete which was stirred into the wind flew toward the two of them. They twist to their side, dodging them. Lin Sanjiu stared back at the green vine, biting her lips tightly. Her heart was thumping loudly. “That won’t work, we have to split up! I will go upstairs, you downstairs!”

“Are you crazy?” Luther was astounded and turned, only to find that he was already staring at the back of her head.

“The corpses were piled just beside the escalator, and the green vines could reach them. That clearly means that we will be attacked throughout the way back!” While Lin Sanjiu explained, she had already picked up a broken concrete slab beside her, aimed and threw it at the green vine in lightning speed.

It was as if the vine in mid-air grew eyes; it suddenly shifted upwards avoiding the slab. Before Luther could react, Lin Sanjiu shot up the stairs like an arrow while she yelled, “I will attract its attention here. Quick! Tell Marcie to bring some liquor over to rescue me! Get those with a high alcohol content!”

Within the time it took for her to say that, the vine had already aimed a few consecutive attacks at her—Lin Sanjiu managed to dodge the first few attack, but just as she was about to finish climbing the final few steps, she was cut by the last slash of wind. It tore a hole in her pants, and a little blood seeped from her wound. Not caring the least bit about that, Lin Sanjiu jumped and leaped forward, reaching the second floor at last. She immediately hid behind one of the doors belonging to a store.

Luther, who has been staring at her, only felt his heart settling

down at this point. He knew what Lin Sanjiu was planning. He felt anxious for her but also admired her quick-thinking, “You are crazy! Take care, Marcie and I will come back as soon as possible!”

“Leave! It’s going for you now!” Lin Sanjiu yelled as she gave the store’s door a kick.

The green vine lingered for a moment mid-air. In that half-second, Luther used the full potential of his enhanced body and sprinted toward the escalator like the wind. Seeing that the green vine was almost bent on following him, Lin Sanjiu rushed out of the store without delay and threw a promotional board at it.

Luther simply did not have the time to turn to look, he could only trust that Lin Sanjiu was providing him cover as he ran like mad for the escalator. He rushed down the escalator in a split-second and, sure enough, the green vine did not chase after him.

He only ran a few steps toward the supermarket when he nearly collided into Marcie—she had heard and realized that something was wrong, so she quickly ran outside. When she saw Luther, she shot him a series of questions, “What happened? What was that sound outside? Where is Xiao Jiu?”

“I have no time to explain; we have to get some liquor! Grab the wines and spirits with high alcohol content!” Ignoring the fact that Marcie was still confused, Luther rushed into the supermarket, grabbing some shopping bags on his way and headed for the alcoholic beverage section.

Marcie did not know what had happened, but she moved quickly. Before even a full ten minutes, the two of them were both carrying a few bags of wine.

“Do you have a lighter on you?”

“Yes! What are we going to burn?” Seeing the association between the wine and the lighter, Marcie caught the drift.

Luther gave a wry smile, “We have to go destroy the greenery!”

He nodded saying this and ran toward the escalator first. The two of them climbed the escalator alongside each other. Just as they were about to reach the top, Luther suddenly stopped. After he had paused to think for a moment, he decided to peek out cautiously first. It was quiet on the first floor; nothing seemed out of place.

The terrifyingly crafty length of vine had already disappeared from the mid-air. The tropical forest in the middle of the mall was just plainly there, as still as before. He could not spot Lin Sanjiu as well. He looked upward, but there was no movement on the second floor. If it hadn't been for that damaged segment of stairs, he would have thought that it was just a dream.

Marcie stepped closer to him and whispered, "What exactly happened? Where is Xiao Jiu?"

Luther could feel a bitter taste in his mouth as he muttered, "I don't know..."

After briefing Marcie about the whole incident, Luther felt his heart grew tenser and tenser. If Lin Sanjiu messed up, and the green vine successfully attack her, what should they do if she ended up like that mountain of corpses?

After hearing what he said, Marcie also thought of the same possibility. Suddenly feeling too anxious, she unexpectedly raised her voice and shouted, "Xiao Jiu! Where are you? Please reply!" her voice rang out loudly in the spacious shopping mall, triggering off a series of echoes.

Luther was shocked; he quickly looked toward the tropical forest and noticed that the leaves of the tallest few coconut trees in the center started to move—it was practically like how a person turned his head when he heard a sound. Mostly likely because the two of them were still hidden at the escalator, which was the tropical forest's blind spot, Marcie's shouting voice did not attract any attacks.

Knowing this, he was relieved. Therefore he joined Marcie and

started to shout with Marcie.

Both their voices were amplified by the surrounding to such an extent that their voices were almost deafeningly loud. However, Lin Sanjiu still did not show her face. The longer they yelled, the more worried they felt.

Suddenly, after there was a sound of an opening door, they heard Lin Sanjiu's voice coming from an unknown location, "Have you gotten the liquor? I'm alright, don't worry!"

"Where are you?" Marcie searched hastily for the source of her voice. Probably because of the echoes, Lin Sanjiu's voice seemed to come from all directions. "You won't be able to see me. I'm on the fourth story."

"Why did you go up there?" Luther asked, puzzled. She should have faced more attacks climbing up, but the staircase up from the second floor was totally intact.

"I had no choice! Whichever store I hid in, the bloody vine would destroy the entire thing. If I didn't think to hide in the stairways used by the staff, I wouldn't be able to survive till now."

Luther only noticed then that the fancy and exquisite storefronts of the branded stores on the second floor have all been destroyed. In any case, he felt relieved after hearing that Lin Sanjiu was safe. He really didn't think of that before. Normally, many customers were moving around the shopping mall, and they used the easily visible staircases and escalators. But if the staff had to transport some rubbish or move their cleaning equipment or something, they would not squeeze with the customers, so there was definitely a backup hidden passageway. Lin Sanjiu was just lucky to spot that staff passageway.

"Then, how will you come back to the supermarket?" Marcie asked still feeling deeply worried.

It had taken a while before Lin Sanjiu's voice rang out again, "I

reckon that there must be a way to get to the basement from this staff passageway. Don't burn the trees first. I found out just now that the tropical forest is linked to the flower bed on the fifth story. If the entire fifth story gets burn as well, it will be too dangerous. Why don't we do this? Both of you should go back first. We will meet in the basement."

Luther and Marcie exchanged looks. They worriedly implored her to be careful before they went back to the supermarket. They put them the full bags of wines and walked around the supermarket uneasily. Other than the back door that was dead bolted, there was no other entrance.

"It seems that the staff passageway is behind that door..." Marcie shook the brass lock on the door. "We need to open this door; otherwise, how would she come in later?" Luther's head ached when he observed that the back door was also made of durable materials. Even the keys that they got from the dead manager was with Lin Sanjiu, yet the door was locked from inside. There wasn't even a gap at the bottom of the door. Luther walked another around, not wanting to give up. This time he found a suitable weapon. At a nondescript corner, there was a red fire hydrant box. He broke the outer glass with his elbow and found a small hammer.

"Quick! We can use this to smash open the door!" He hurried to the back door, presenting it to Marcie like a treasure. Marcie's knitted brows relaxed a little when she saw the hammer. Luther was stronger than her, so she scowled, signaling for Luther to start hammering.

After a few hits, sparks appeared as the hammer hit the lock. Unfortunately, the door did not show even a hint that it was opening. The knocking sounds were amplified multiple times in the cavernous supermarket. Wang Sisi, who seemed to be startled, gave a few sudden shrieks. Just when the two of them were just going to ignore her and continue hammering, they heard a familiar

voice: “My god! I entered the staff room!”

Chapter 21: Welcome Back

The third passive skill that she had developed last night couldn't have been timelier.

In the dark, Lin Sanjiu managed to avoid the kitchen knife thrown at her from the staff room with a quick dodge. She silently thanked the heavens. Without her Overall Physical Enhancement ability, she would not have been able to dodge the smelly kitchen knife that Wang Sisi suddenly threw at her, much less the attacks of that crafty and speedy green vine.

The kitchen knife fell not far from her and made a clanging sound. In the time that Wang Sisi's attack missed, Lin Sanjiu had already nimbly jumped backward and conveniently closed the door with a bang, blocking other incoming attacks. It was only then that she heard a series of dragging sounds from the other side. After that, she heard the muffled voices of both Luther and Marcie.

Through the two doors, Marcie's voice had an unmasked anxiousness: "Xiao Jiu, are you alright? Try to leave quickly, we do not have the keys to enter!"

"I am alright! I already came out of the room!" Lin Sanjiu replied loudly. "The little desiccated corpse pulled off the knife in its mouthpart and threw that at me just now. But I am unharmed!"

Wang Sisi hissed angrily as Lin Sanjiu suddenly felt the vibration of the door she was leaning against. It was as if it had been struck violently by something—probably Wang Sisi's mouthpart. Lin Sanjiu took a few steps away from the door hurriedly and quickly relocked the door with her key. After hearing Wang Sisi's frustrated screech, Lin Sanjiu took out the lighter in her pocket and lit it.

Ever since her body had been enhanced, her night vision had improved significantly: even without light, she could see with about 60% to 70% clarity in the dark, so she did not need to look

blindly for a light source like a moth. However, that was also the reason why she did not carefully check her surroundings carefully. She was totally focused on returning to the supermarket and ran straight in when she saw a door, and that was how she came face to face with Wang Sisi's deformed face for a brief moment just now.

Since she could not return immediately right now, she decided to use the light from her lighter to explore the area. When her eyes swept across the area, Lin Sanjiu promptly held her breath uncontrollably. Just ten steps away from her, she saw rows of goods shelves which were at least the height of two persons. At one glance, the shelves were different from those in the supermarket. They were almost touching the ceiling, and each level on the shelves was filled with properly packaged boxes. She could tell that the majority of the boxes were food and drinks.

She suppressed her excitement and jogged to the front of the shelves. She could not help softly touching the boxes of mineral water with her hands. Last night, after her ability was discovered, the three of them started from the scratch and counted the amount of food and water they had. They had to concede that what they had left was an aftermath of a pillage. Even though there was quite a significant amount of goods left, but after what they had consumed, there were only enough supplies for another two weeks.

"I was wondering why we couldn't find the warehouse..." Lin Sanjiu laughed till her eyes glistened. Speaking to herself, she softly cursed, "So you have been hiding here, with a desiccated corpse guarding the door, no less!"

When she would go back, she would have to think of a method to store all these things in the warehouse.

The bottles of "life source" wrapped in a pink hard case glowed under the light of the flame. As she saw the full shelf of mineral water, Lin Sanjiu opened a box and took a bottle as she was feeling thirsty.

Just then, she heard Marcie's and Luther's voice from the other side of the staff room door once again, "Xiao Jiu, what are you doing now? Can you think of a way to get back?"

"I am okay! I found the supermarket's warehouse..." Lin Sanjiu replied. She sat outside the staff room entrance deciding to rest for a while to regain her energy. There were confidence and resilience in her voice as she said, "I will definitely find a way to get back, don't worry."

There were a few more muffled sentences from the other side as if the other two of them were trying to tell her some instructions, but thereafter there were no other sounds. Lin Sanjiu snapped the lighter shut, and the warehouse returned to its original dark silence.

[At this time, Wang Sisi must also be thinking of a strategy behind that door, right?] Lin Sanjiu thought inwardly as she drank a mouthful of water, enjoying the cool fluid going down her throat. She really could not underestimate that little desiccated corpse. She made a lot of noise and movements when she was pulling out her the keys to open the door, but Wang Sisi purposely kept very silent, so Lin Sanjiu totally did not suspect that she was opening the back door of the staff room. If she had not smelled the rotting stench that wafted out once the door opened, she would not have been alert enough to dodge Wang Sisi's attack.

Now, the two routes back to the supermarket were blocked, similar to how their paths were blocked by the broken down Land Rover. In the large hall, there was a weird, unpredictable forest; if she chose the path through the staff room, she had to bypass Wang Sisi.

In any case, she had to vote for the lesser evil. After she waited for an unknown amount of time, Lin Sanjiu finally made her decision. She stood up silently in the dark and placed her light, water bottle, and other random things aside. She wrung her hands and gave a soft sigh. It was time to test out how powerful her

Overall Physical Enhancement ability was.

She slotted the key lightly in the keyhole and turned left once. The metal lock made a tiny sound. In the absolute silence, that small sound was so loud that it was shocking. It was impossible that Wang Sisi did not hear it, and almost immediately, as if to prove her right, a chain of “gugu” sounds ranged out. Lin Sanjiu could sense something walking closer.

She did not say a word but stealthily turned the door handle. The door slowly opened up a gap that was wide enough for a person.

The heavy darkness remained silent, and it was as if even the flow of air had stopped. Almost abruptly, a black shadow suddenly shot out from that gap in a swoosh. It targeted the area right behind the door handle. The speed was too fast, even with her body enhancement, Lin Sanjiu definitely wouldn't be able to dodge it...

However, the attack which was supposed to certainly hit missed its target.

“Huh?” Wang Sisi made a human sound after some time. She shook her mouthpart around the door area and realized that Lin Sanjiu had disappeared all of a sudden and was nowhere to be seen.

Hesitating for a moment, Wang Sisi walked two steps toward the door cautiously. A sweet voice came out from her mouthpart, “Big Sister, where are you? Sisi doesn't want to fight with you. Can you just let Sisi go, okay?”

Nobody replied her. Outside the half-opened door, it was still that same silent darkness. She could not see Lin Sanjiu's figure or hear any movement. It was like there had never been a person that at all.

A hand, so dry that it no longer resembled a human's, peeked from the door as if to push it open. It paused and retreated. After a while, a horrible looking thing crept out stealthily from the room.

That was Wang Sisi. After they had not seen it for days, it had become more shriveled, similar to security guard, its skin now layered on top of each other. Due to Luther's kick, there was a deep impression on its chest; thus even the last human-like vestige was lost. The gap was not wide, but it was sufficient for Wang Sisi.

“Big sister! Big sister! I am out. Don't be afraid, okay? Sisi just wants to go home to look for mommy...” Its two white eyeballs rolled around searching the warehouse, but it couldn't spot Lin Sanjiu at all. It spun its mouthpart nervously. She could smell the scent of a live human's blood, but it could not tell where it was from. This made Wang Sisi, who had not eaten for days, rash and jittery. The child-like voice that was generated from its mouthpart was filled with a sobbing tone: “Big Sister, if you don't come out, I will take it as your consent. Sisi is leaving, she is going home...” the little girl's voice reverberated in the dark. She stabbed her mouthpart towards the back of the door—the only place that a person could hide!

Her mouthpart which shimmered with a metallic light stabbed into nothing.

“Are you going to suck your mother dry?” a plain, mocking voice came from above her.

Wang Sisi was shocked. She immediately looked up. Before she could pull back her mouthpart from the back of the door, a black shadow fell on her. Following that moment, the door trapped her mouthpart. Before Wang Sisi could scream, there was a sudden flash of light above her head, and before she knew it, a chef's knife had penetrated its skull. In an instant, Wang Sisi's body along with its mouthpart fell to the ground with a “pak” as it lost all its strength.

Seeing that the corpse was motionless, Lin Sanjiu gave a sigh of relief. She had been crouching on top of the narrow ledge of the door. She remained silent before choosing an opportunity to jump down from the door. This was an extremely difficult feat—she

never imagined that she would be able to execute such ninja-like action sequence before the New World descended.

She pinched her nose as she carefully walked past the dead body and went to open the other door in the staff room.

As the door opened, the silver light resembling the moonlight, which the Ability Polishing Agent emitted, shined on Lin Sanjiu's entire body. The shelves, used for block the door have, have already been removed by the two other outside. Luther was standing, and Marcie was sitting as they waited quietly for her to return. "Welcome back!" Luther greeted cheerily, leaning on the wall, as he held the Ability Polishing Agent in one hand.

Chapter 22: Starting a Journey!

If one only used their naked eyes to look at the scenery, the intense sun that hung high in the sky was no different from any other summer. The dazzling sunlight shined down from the blue skies and only revealed its unspeakable malice when it blazed over the earth.

Shriveled dead bodies covered in burns were found on every single street. Buildings split open under the high heat, and houses made of inferior materials had long disintegrated into small hills of rubble. There were cracks on the ground and occasionally, one could spot a considerably healthy duoluozhong moving around the ruins.

In the short two months, the temperature continued rising every day; and on this day, it was as if all traces of humankind had melted under that heat, it was difficult to believe that this was once a highly developed human civilization.

The air was dry and hot; no one knew where all that moisture went when the lakes and rivers evaporated. As far as their eyes could see, there was not a single bit of greenery left. Every path that it took, the truck would stir up a thick cloud of yellow dust which reached half the height of an adult, making it difficult to see much at all.

Lin Sanjiu was sitting in the driver's seat and could not resist taking a look at the rearview mirror. Right behind her vehicle was a similar type of large goods truck and then another long public bus, but that was not the focus of her gaze. She narrowed her eyes and looked carefully at the thick column of smoke, in the distance, rising to the air. The place where the smoke rose from was exactly the shopping mall which had housed them for a month.

After living there for such a long time, they finally had to leave... Lin Sanjiu's train of thought involuntarily drifted back to their

situation a month before.

Back then, Lin Sanjiu had unintentionally found the supermarket warehouse which was packed with supplies. They were really ecstatic—even without counting, they knew at one glance that the food and water in the warehouse were certainly sufficient for them to survive for fourteen months. In addition to that, living in that underground supermarket meant that they did not have to worry about the problem of being under direct sunlight, they could even call it a totally ideal situation!

The only problem they had was still that patch of tropical forest in the middle of the mall.

Humans coveted for comfort after all. After the few of them had discussed for a while, they considered their situation and concluded that if there were to lock themselves in the supermarket, that abomination of a tropical forest outside should not be able to do anything to them. Since they had experienced a few days of tense, hair-raising incidents, they had used up a lot of their strength. In the name of recuperation, they decided to make the supermarket their home.

The “recuperation” lasted for two to three weeks. As they did not have to worry about the lack of sustenance, while the shutter door kept out any threats of external enemies, the three of them had the first taste of a somewhat comfortable life in a New World. It was to the extent that after a month, Lin Sanjiu found that she became fatter when she randomly pinched her waist. Honestly speaking, the amount of fats wasn’t that much, but it instantly evoked in her the image of fattened livestock. During that period of time, she did not develop a single new ability, and her movements had also slowed down considerably. Without any sense of crisis, she had even spent a few days just sleeping in the darkness.

If they continued on like this, she knew that it would be detrimental for all of them. After they had discussed about it, they decided that they had to go and patrol the place. Firstly, it was for

them to check the situation nearby, and next for them to train themselves. The idea seemed pretty good, but when they opened the metal shutters, the three of them froze.

When they pulled open the shutter, it was around four plus in the afternoon. However, the escalator that led up to the first floor was still shrouded in darkness. Lin Sanjiu looked blankly ahead and asked softly, “Does this mean that the sun sets that early now?”

Luther was speechless. Suddenly, Marcie pointed upward yelling, “Look!” Lin Sanjiu and Luther looked in the direction that she pointed and their guts sunk at once.

They observed a sudden slight movement from the portion of darkness that was covering the escalator as if a reaction from a stimulus. The movement wasn't their main concern. A little sunlight immediately seeped in revealing the underside of the cover which was an intricate green network of branches, tendrils, and leaves. The three of them finally realized why it was pitch dark outside the metal shutters, it was because the entire area was covered by plants.

Subsequently, there were more movements in the shadow. All sort of large and small, densely-packed green vines started stirring one by one as if they could smell the scent of a human. They crept slowly toward the metal shutter. They did not know who yelled first, but the three of them did not dare to tarry even for a second. They turned and rushed for the supermarket and pulled the shutters down with a clang.

The green vines slammed noisily on the metal shutter. Unexpectedly, multiple bulges appeared on the heavy metal shutter. If they went out a few more times, it certainly wouldn't hold up much longer.

Once they returned to the supermarket, there was a grim expression on all their faces. None of them expected that their position would change from them making the decision to isolate

themselves from the world to becoming trapped here so quickly.

“We can’t stay here any longer...” Lin Sanjiu smiled bitterly, “What should we do now?”

“Even if we leave, we have to bring along the supplies from the warehouse,” Marcie said gritting her teeth tightly.

“It is not difficult to bring those items with us. We can find a few large trucks outside, and we can try to pack as much as we can. The problem now is... how we can actually get out? The only exit had been entirely blocked by those vines,” Lin Sanjiu asked worriedly.

The three of them remained silent for a while. Suddenly, Luther exclaimed, “Ah!” and leaped up like a rabbit. He turned and ran toward the back of the supermarket, yelling at the same time, “The escalator exit isn’t the only way! Xiao Jiu, bring your keys along! There is still a back door behind!”

His words reminded Marcie of the same thing. She clapped her hands together, and her face brightened, “That’s right! How could I have forgotten!” She pulled Lin Sanjiu along, following quickly behind Luther.

Within a few seconds, they were standing at the back door of the supermarket. Ever since Lin Sanjiu had appeared in the staff room, Luther and Marcie had both completely forgotten about the back door. This was the first time that Lin Sanjiu even knew of the existence of this back door which opened to who knows where.

She prayed silently as she opened the door with her key. The heavens were on their side. The door opened to a narrow slope. Walking down the slope, the few of them found themselves beside a row of large rubbish bins. They were standing at the back side of the shopping mall. Apparently, this was the place where the staff washed their equipment and dispose of their rubbish. After they walked further down, they quickly saw a small road.

When they looked back into the glass windows at the shopping

mall now covered in green vines and plants, for the first time in their lives, they could not understand how that small road covered with cracks could look so... cute.

They knew what they had to do next.

Firstly, they had to look for three vehicles. That wasn't hard at all since 80% of the human population had all died, leaving a city full of abandoned vehicles with empty tanks and working keys in their ignition switch. Without much effort, the three of them found two large freight trucks and a public bus.

They got some batteries from an automobile repair shop and changed those in the vehicles, then they filled up a few jerrycans of petrol. They eventually got the vehicles to work. They drove the three large vehicles into the small road and parked them in a straight line after much difficulty navigating within the narrow confines.

They managed to fill up their vehicles to the brink with food and water. Even after that, there were still a lot of supplies in the warehouse. As the three of them were not greedy, after figuring out that the amount in their vehicles should be sufficient, they laid both sides of the walkway with the remaining supplies for any possible lucky survivors.

Before they left, Lin Sanjiu carried with her a few jerrycans of petrol; Luther and Marcie prepared a full carton of wine.

“Are you ready?” Lin Sanjiu, who had grabbed a piece of brick, grinned at her companions. Seeing their nods, she yelled, “Okay! Let's start throwing!”

With whooping yells from Luther, bricks, rocks, chairs, and all sort of paraphernalia came falling down like meteor rain upon the shopping mall's glass windows—enveloped in plants.

A series of bright clear sounds could be heard along half the street as glass fragments fell from mid-air like rain. The dark night

was suddenly filled with the shimmering reflections from the glass.

The tendrils and vines that were leaning against the windows suddenly dangled in mid-air as if they were unable to decide who to attack. But before those vines could trace the human scent back to the culprits, bottles after bottles of strong alcoholic beverages, and cans after cans of petrol flew into from the broken windows. In an instant, the plants were splashed with all that accelerants.

The final step of setting the fire required a little more technique. Among the three of them, Marcie was the fastest and lightest. She held four to five lit matches in each hand and raced to the entrance of the shopping mall like a hare. She flung the matches, and they flew and landed into the large patch of greenery.

The flames spread out, hissing and crackling, it was not quick but steadfast. In a short time, the first floor was fully lit up by a sea of red burning flames. Before even burning for five minutes, they heard a sharp shrill from the center of the large hall in the middle of the shopping mall. It sounded as if something was in pain. All the leaves started flailing around crazily.

For whatever reason, Lin Sanjiu suddenly felt a sort of long-awaited ecstasy. She laughed out loud a few time and waved to the two people beside her saying, "Let's go!" After that, she turned and was the first person to run out of the road.

After the few of them had ran out of that street, they heard a large "Boom!" The glass ceiling situated on the top floor of the shopping mall collapsed down to the ground due to fire, following which, half the building was totally buried in flames.

They had parked the truck and bus far away from that location earlier. Each of them now drove a vehicle under the remaining starlight just before the sunrise. They hit the road starting on their unknown journey.

Shaking her head, Lin Sanjiu banished the memories of the

events that happened last night. She looked at her rear mirror once again with a serious look. She then turned on her tail light, slowed down her vehicle and stopped.

“What’s wrong? Why aren’t we continuing?” Luther winded down his window and shouted loudly in Lin Sanjiu’s direction. Lin Sanjiu opened the truck door and jumped down. She stood in the middle of the road and held a police baton in her hand.

“Someone is following behind us.” She frowned as she braced the yellow dust in the air.

Chapter 23: Gaining a New Member

The scorching sun overhead roasted everything with its intense heat. Once she stepped out of the vehicle, the torrid heat immediately made her breathing difficult. There was still wind in this Hyperthermal Hell, but it would be better if there weren't. Every bout of wind was as if a pot of red hot coal had been thrown at their face.

After they had got out of their vehicles, Luther and Marcie's brows furrowed deeply as they covered their noses and mouths. Ever since all the plants and trees have died out, the soil degraded into sand under the high heat due to desertification. The wind stirred up thick clouds of yellow sand wreaking havoc upon the land. Their eyebrows and eyelashes were all covered with sand particles, so it was difficult for them to open their eyes. They could only squint as they looked around.

Once Marcie opened her mouth to speak, she started coughing due to the sand before she managed to say a few words, "Are you sure? I was at the back; but I didn't spot any other cars behind us."

When Lin Sanjiu got down from her truck, she conveniently grabbed a T-shirt and tied it to her face using it as a mask, so she felt much better compared to the other two. Tolerating the pain from the scalding yellow sand which lashed continuously at her exposed skin, Lin Sanjiu said quietly, "I am certain. That car had been following us for some time. But the sandstorm is really bad, and it is quite some distance from us, so it was only visible at times... Wait, it's coming!"

When she finished her sentence, they indeed spotted a car some distance away stirring up a trail of dust. A Citroën so dirty that its color was indistinguishable, drove out of the churning storm of sand.

Unexpectedly, when the driver saw that the three large vehicles

had stopped, and Lin Sanjiu and her gang were in the middle of the road, the person braked sharply and turned his head as if he planned to escape. Unfortunately, the distance between the car and the three vehicles was too near, so this wasn't up to the driver. Lin Sanjiu sprinted forward and sped up and, before the Citroën could turn away, she leaped onto the hood of the like leopard.

The hood of the car dipped which shocked the driver of the Citroën. Its wheels made an ear-piercing screech, and the driver inside shouted vaguely. Lin Sanjiu was rocked by the movement of the car, so she quickly laid low on the hood stabilizing herself before she yelled toward the car interior, "Get out!"

Within a blink of an eye, Luther and Marcie also rushed forward and surrounded the Citroën together with Lin Sanjiu. The car stopped, and its engine was cut.

Through the dirty windscreen, Lin Sanjiu could see the vague outlines of a person. She could not tell if it was a male or female, young or old. It was incomprehensible how that person could still drive with such visibility. She had waited for a while before she knocked on the windscreen with her police baton impatiently, signaling for the driver to get out of his car.

If she was not wrong, the car had been following them since they had left the shopping mall.

The car door at the side of the driver seat opened. A man wearing a crumpled western suit wiped his forehead as he stepped out.

The man looked like he was only about twenty plus. He wasn't tall, and his skin was tanned. He had a round fleshy face, and the white shirt that he was wearing was now a dirty, blackish yellow. Lin Sanjiu did not know why, but she felt that if he had some whiskers, he would certainly look like a vole. Even though his suit looked like it was made from a good material, it did not seem to fit him well. His pants, far too long for him, were rolled up, revealing his ash-grey, knee-length socks.

“Who are you? Why are you following us?” Marcie questioned with a frown.

The vole-like man moved his tar-black little eyes and looked at the three of them panic-strickenly before he stammered, “ It... It wasn’t on purpose.”

Luther scoffed at him, “So you accidentally followed us all the way here?”

Lin Sanjiu jumped down from the car. She gripped the police baton and stood in front of the car not saying a word. The man appeared to be very afraid of Lin Sanjiu. When she got off his car, he immediately shifted a few steps away from her, putting some distance between himself and her. At the same time, he anxiously explained, “No, no. Listen to my explanation. I’ve actually seen all of you much earlier. I don’t mean any harm. I am a salesman for medical devices. That night, I had just finished entertaining my client. When he was driving me back, there was a sudden power outage, and we were stuck in the jam at the shopping mall...”

“Get to the main point!” Marcie shouted in a sterner tone, probably losing her temper as they were tormented by the sand.

“Ahh... yes, yes. Anyway, we were stuck in front of the shopping mall, and we did not dare to get down from the car. We relied only on the carton of drinks in the car for two days... I saw the few of you a couple of times, entering and exiting. You seemed to have adapted so quickly, it was impressive!” when the man explained to this point, he even remembered to flatter them. Noticing that they did not react, he spat out the sand in his mouth, embarrassingly. Then, he continued, “After that, on one night, a rather good-looking woman came to us. She said that she had water at home and told my client to get down to accompany her to get some water. I was distracted for a moment, and suddenly, my client disappeared! The women left and continued to the next car!”

The three of them were stunned for a short moment. Obviously,

Kong Yun did not show mercy to the survivors who were on that street outside.

When the man saw their expression, he pushed his luck and continued, “I did not dare to remain in the car, so I ran to the convenient store that was across the road. I managed to survive till today... This morning, I saw all of you leaving. I was afraid too, so I followed behind...”

“What’s your name?” Luther was starting to feel a little annoyed as the man was so long-winded.

“My name is Tian Minbo. Everyone calls me Voley,” the man smiled and replied hurriedly.

Apparently, she was not the only one that felt that way. Lin Sanjiu chuckled inwardly, but her cold expression remained the same as she asked, “What do you want?”

Voley was startled and quickly replied, “I really mean no harm. I have my own supply of food and water. I just want some companions. And, I wanted to give you an advice.”

“An advice?”

“You have been driving your vehicles for some time right?” Voley asked as he eyed the vehicles. “I advise all of you to stop driving now. You should wait till night comes.”

“Why?” Luther looked around, still frowning. The spot they were at was not very safe. In the past, the area was a famous park. It was originally a vast expanse of greenery and the best part of the city. However, after this one month, any remnant of the original park had long disintegrated. All that remained was just sand as far as the eye could see and the blacked charred remains of countless trees, along with the mixture of this combination stirred by the wind. They could even see the indistinct outlines of a few duoluozhong wandering around. The sky was a hopeless mustard yellow accompanied by a scalding sun.

“This weather is really abnormally hot. If you continue driving, you will burn out the engines. You better believe me. I have already damaged one car, and that was a Mercedes Benz. Still, it broke down! It nearly burst into flames! Let alone your trucks and bus...” Voley wiped the sand off his face showing a sincere look. “It’s true. If you don’t believe it, you can try to touch your engines.”

Hearing this, Lin Sanjiu sighed and stopped Marcie who was heading back to check, “You don’t have to go. It’s true. Even his Citroën is hot to touch.”

When Voley heard what Lin Sanjiu said, he immediately moaned and turned to open his hood. A white smoke accompanied by a burnt scent drifted out. It almost instantaneously dissipated due to the sandstorm. Voley fiddled with the engine nervously, he finally lifted his head with a face still filled with lingering fear, “That was close. It nearly broke down.”

The three of them exchanged looks. They were at a loss. If even that France-manufactured Citroën was going to break down soon, what more could be said of their normal vehicles, they were certainly in a worse state. It seemed like that had no choice but to wait here with Voley for their engines to cool down. The only thing was that Lin Sanjiu was opposed strongly to staying here due to the surroundings.

Their surroundings were too empty. After the park which covered the area of a few thousand square meters had become destitute of vegetation, there was an almost boundless, unobstructed view of the area. That is to say, if they met any danger, they wouldn’t be able to find a place to hide.

Marcie sighed, “It looks like we’ll have to wait.”

“That’s right. Besides, it is too hot outside, so it is not a good place to chat. Why don’t all of you come into my car, we can chat in the car? Let’s be friends!” Seeing that the others were convinced

by him, Voley quickly opened his door eagerly, even offering Marcie a bottle of water. “I don’t have a specific place that I want to go, I just want to find a few companions. Where are you all heading? If you don’t mind, let me go along with you?”

The three of them looked at each other and did not reply for a while.

After that whole incident with Kong Yun, they knew that they had to be more cautious; on the other hand, they knew that they could not let the incident affect all their future decisions. No matter what, they would definitely need to interact with other people. When Lin Sanjiu thought of this, she said, “You can come along with us, but you need to tell us what’s your ability.”

Voley made an “O” shape with his mouth.

“Don’t tell me that you don’t know anything about abilities after this one month?” Lin Sanjiu gave a cool expression and purposely used a threatening tone. “How are we supposed to trust you and be your companions if we don’t even know what you can do.”

Even though she put it that way, Luther and Marcie looked at each other with some unease. They could not blame him if he did not want to reveal his ability, it wasn’t really wrong...

But they did not anticipate that Voley would nod his head with little hesitation, “So you already knew that... Okay, I will show you.”

After he had said this, he took out a mobile phone from his pocket. The mobile phone was in a cheapskate plastic casing, making it look very unfashionable. Voley pressed a few buttons on the screen then showed the screen to the three of them. The screen showed an ongoing call, and the party on the other side was actually 110[1].

“This mobile phone is my ability. 110 is the only number that I can call right now. If I was under attack, I could dial 110, and in the

time frame of 5 to 10 minutes, I will be impervious to all attacks. Of course, it works faster than my demonstration.” Voley looked a little timid as he asked, “Is this okay?”

While Lin Sanjiu was still considering, with knitted brows. Marcie had already taken the first step, turned to look at her for confirmation, “I think that is enough, right? Xiao Jiu?” After that, she gave Voley her outstretched hand and smiled, “Let’s help each other out in the future.”

Translator notes:[1]1-1-0, the emergency telephone number used to reach police services in Iran, Germany, Estonia, China and Japan. Also used to reach the fire and rescue services in Norway and Turkey. -Wikipedia

Chapter 24: It's a Universal Law that the Main Character Must Die? (1)

Lin Sanjiu could feel something pressing uncomfortably against the back of her head. Half a day had already passed. She felt exhausted and did not feel like moving, so she just flipped sideways hazily. At that very moment, she suddenly heard a line from a song, “You are my little, little apple”[1]. It broke the tranquility of the night and sounded rather irritating.

[Whose ringtone is so loud? That’s too disturbing. I can even hear it from the 38th floor.]

Lin Sanjiu suppressed her sleepiness and opened her eyes. She saw a row of orange round circular grab handles. [That’s right, I am not in that 38th floor penthouse—this is the New World...]

She sat upright and saw the rows of seats which were filled with cardboard cartons of supplies. On the side of the wall beside her, there was still a green sign stating, “Priority Seat for elderly, disabled, pregnant, and injured”. The rare starlight from outside the windows illuminated the rim of the sign dimly.

At the top of the exit doors, there was a piece of route map of something similar to that. But the only thing she could discern was the numerical “3”.

Suddenly, there were a few quick knocks on the door of their public bus. The volume of the “Little Apple” song grew louder and was followed by Voley’s voice, “Hey, it’s already ten, you should all wake up. Let’s go!”

Lin Sanjiu rubbed her eyes as memories of the current reality flooded her mind.

That’s right. This afternoon, they had agreed to bring Voley along their journey. They even went into his car, eating, drinking, and chatting for a long time. Even though Voley looked like a timid

guy, they only found out that he was quite an attentive person after interacting with him. To conserve their energy for the night, all of them went to rest quickly. Voley, being the only person with a mobile phone, had volunteered to set an alarm so that they could set off at ten pm. Lin Sanjiu jumped up and walked over the driver's seat. She pressed a button, and the door of the public bus opened, showing Voley who was still cladded in that oversized western suit.

Lin Sanjiu eyed him a little moodily, "You should switch that alarm off quickly. What will we do if it attracts the duoluozhongs here? And the volume of that thing is way too loud!"

Voley responded with an "Oh. Oh." and quickly switched his phone off. Once that "Little Apple" song faded, Lin Sanjiu felt that the world became much more peaceful. Voley smiled and asked, "Where is Miss Marcie? What about Xiao Lu, are they awake?"

"They're at the back..." Lin Sanjiu replied.

Meanwhile, Marcie yawned and walked over. She rinsed her mouth with mineral water and sat down in the driver's seat sleepily. Luther nodded his head at Voley acknowledging his presence and rubbed his eyes as he headed back to the truck. From the back, he also looked listless.

Everyone looks so tired. Lin Sanjiu thought as she could not help yawning again.

On the contrary, Voley seemed to be in high spirits. He went back and forth checking all the engines. Once he saw that there were no problems, he waved his arms enthusiastically, "That's great. We set off now!"

After she washed up and sat in the truck for a while, her drowsiness slowly abated. She was finally fully awake. She looked at the map in her hands searching for the road towards the industrial park in Xijiao and was the first one to start up her vehicle.

Xijiao was one of the famous industrial parks in the city; there were all sorts of factories and processing plants there. The factories there usually had their own dormitories and canteens—basically, they were pretty much small self-contained ecospheres. Once they reached there, finding backup electrical generators, supplies and shelter shouldn't be a problem.

The other vehicles followed her lead and slowly started their engines.

She had to admit that allowing Voley to join them was right. He not only knew how to maintain cars, but the most surprising thing was that he had a few sets of walkie-talkies in his car. Even though the walkie-talkies could only work within a short distance, but at least they could communicate with each other while driving their own respective vehicles now.

Luther's jovial voice came through the walkie-talkie on the seat beside her, "Xiao Jiu, how far are we from the industrial park?"

"It depends. If we don't meet any traffic obstructions, this shortest route should only take an hour. After we go over this hill, we will be able to see a traffic sign soon..." just as she said this, her stomach suddenly made a weird grumble. [That's bad,] she silently thought to herself.

Sure enough, Luther heard that sound, "Haha! What's that sound? Do we have to stop for a while so that you can relieve yourself?" There was a sound of a laughter escaping from someone—obviously Marcie. "I am just a little hungry," Lin Sanjiu scolded jokingly, "I'm sure a brat like you doesn't have a girlfriend!" while she said this, she searched for a packet of cookies irritably, opened up the packaging and ate a piece, as the others laughed over the walkie-talkies.

They were actually quite lucky since most of the cars, on the road they were on, parked lawfully at the side of the road. Even when they occasionally met some abandoned cars blocking the road, they

managed to squeeze through—due to the serious desertification, the boundaries between the road and the sidewalk was no longer so clearly defined. As a result, even after they had been driving for over ten minutes, the group of vehicles was still heading toward the industrial park via the shortcut.

“I heard a ‘pop’ sound just now, did any of you heard that?” Marcie suddenly asked while driving. Voley immediately responded worriedly, “Miss Marcie, let’s hope that it is not a problem with your engines. Where did that sound come from?”

“It is too muffled, so I am not sure. But there is no sound now.”

“If you hear it again, I will help your check the engines again!”

After hearing that, Lin Sanjiu could not help looking at her rear mirror. Behind the second truck, she could see the public bus. It was moving normally, and she could even see Marcie’s vague outline sitting in the driver seat. Nothing looked out of place. Not thinking anything more about that, she casually winded down her window. A gust of hot night wind rushed in, and her hair instantly flowed behind her.

The subsequent turn of events played out like a movie. It happened so clearly yet so unrealistically.

Almost suddenly, she heard a loud cry over the walkie-talkie. That was Luther’s voice, but she could not make out what he was saying. Lin Sanjiu’s heart trembled and just as she was about to ask, “How are you?” She heard a sharp screeching brake. Thereafter, a loud boom of collision rang out in the air.

Lin Sanjiu’s heart skipped a beat, she stuck her head out of the window braving the strong winds and turned to look behind. Her heart almost stopped...

In the scene she saw through her flowing black hair, the front portion of Luther’s truck was now sideways, and the truck was stopped horizontally across the middle of the road. As there was no

time to react, the bus that was behind it collided with it violently. Plumes of thick smoke rose immediately. Luther's body flew out of the driver's seat, as countless broken glass sprayed outwards, his body was stuck in mid-air as if time froze.

A long mouthpart was protruding out from his stomach, and the thing behind the mouthpart was hiding within the truck.

All these happened so quickly that she didn't even have the time to blink.

Lin Sanjiu's eyes turned red, she yelled and stopped her truck. Once she got out of her truck, she raced toward Luther. But before she could reach him, the bus suddenly exploded with a boom. Along with the smoke and flames from the accident, glass flew out everywhere. The glass rain instantaneously scratched Lin Sanjiu's exposed skin, covering her with bleeding cuts all over.

She was pushed to the ground by the shockwave of the explosion, and her whole body was covered with wounds. However, Lin Sanjiu sat in a daze on the ground, as if she did not feel a thing. This was because she could see very clearly: As the glass fragments fell, she also saw pieces of blood covered flesh falling and that familiar red hair.

[You've got to be kidding, right?]

The Citroën that was at the back of the line nearly hit the bus. Voley was so shocked that his face was a ghastly white when he opened his car doors. He shouted, "How... how did this happen?"

After she sat startled for a long time, she finally stood up. Without a word, she ran toward the truck with her red rage filled eyes.

Voley, who was panting heavily, quickly pulled her aside and yelled, "You have to calm down..."

Before he finished his sentence, a dark shadow loomed over him. He lifted his head and was shocked. Probably because Lin Sanjiu

did not secure the brakes on the truck when she stopped her vehicle so suddenly, it had rolled backward toward them. Voley wanted to let go of Lin Sanjiu and escape but the truck was too close—he had only lifted his feet when the large steel body of the truck swallowed the both of them.

First round: it was a complete wipeout.

Translator Note: [1] This is a real viral Chinese song called Little Apple (小蘋果).

Chapter 25: It's a Universal Law that the Main Character Must Die? (2)

In the dark, Lin Sanjiu could feel something pressing uncomfortably against the back of her head. Half a day had already passed. She felt exhausted and did not feel like moving, so she just flipped sideways hazily.

The next second, she woke up abruptly from her dream, panting heavily.

Lin Sanjiu lowered her head and saw her trembling hands. [Dead? Am I dead? Is everyone dead?] She turned her head looking vacantly, she found Marcie and Luther sleeping alongside each other quite close to her. Both of them were frowning as if they were in a sort of nightmare. Even though they were still asleep, she could see the movement of their chests. That was enough proof that they were still alive and well.

[So, was that just a dream?] Lin Sanjiu stood up from the floor. Her hands and feet still felt cold, and her whole body was weak. The moment that she died, the moment all the bones and organs in her body were crushed, the moment when she slipped into a boundless darkness, that almost unbelievable pain... was that all a dream? She shivered.

She opened the door and stepped out of the bus. She desperately needed some fresh air so that she could clear her mind. Just as she stepped outside, a deafening “You are my little, little apple” rang out loudly, tearing the tranquility of the night. Lin Sanjiu paused for a moment. She heard it again, just like the previous time... or more rightly, in her dream. The noisy ringtone did not last as long as in her dream; instead, someone stopped it quickly before even two lines of the song. The darkness returned to a dead silence.

Lin Sanjiu gazed quietly at the direction of the Citroën, motionlessly. Even after a while, Voley did not come out to wake

them. She felt a little impatient and decided to take a look, but suddenly she heard a soft cry of shock from the bus, following which, Marcie called out, “Luther! Xiao Jiu!”

Lin Sanjiu immediately rushed into the bus, at the same time, Luther woke up gasping and sitting upright. The three of them exchanged glances, finding that each of their faces was pale.

“I dreamed that I died!”

The three of them suddenly said together when they matched glances.

“Huh... how could that be?” Luther was the first to react, “Both of you also dreamed of your own death?”

“Not only me...” Lin Sanjiu’s face darkened, “I dreamed that the four of us all died. Why don’t you tell me about your dream first!”

Following the order of their deaths, Luther was the first one to speak, “My dream just now was simply too realistic. I dreamed that we were on the way to an industrial park. Suddenly, a duoluo zhong jumped onto the top of my vehicle. It smashed the windows on the other side and all of a sudden... my stomach...” His face turned pale, and he looked like he could not continue.

“Huh? How can that be? In my dream, you were attacked by a duoluo zhong, so you turned your truck, and I collided with you...” Marcie was shocked as her light brown eyes widened, staring at Luther. “I was badly injured and was trying to climb out of the driver’s seat when...”

“There was a sudden explosion, and you died as well,” Lin Sanjiu interjected with cold sweat all over her body.

“How did you know?”

“That’s because I was around when it happened...” Lin Sanjiu shut her eyes, returning to that scene. “When both of you died, my truck rolled backward and crushed Voley and myself... It was as if heaven played a prank on us. We were all killed just like that!”

“How is this... this possible... Our dreams were all connected?” Luther mumbled to himself.

Marcie and Lin Sanjiu furrowed their brows, they were momentarily speechless. While the atmosphere between them froze over, they heard Voley’s voice outside the bus, “Is everyone awake?” She was not sure if she heard wrongly, but his voice seemed to tremble a little.

[Did he have the same dream?]

Almost as if to verify their thoughts, Voley poked his head in and said, “I want to tell you something but don’t scold me. I just had a dream where every one of us died. I am not trying to jinx us, but we have to be careful today! That dream was just too realistic! Hey, what’s wrong? Why are you looking at me like that?”

Lin Sanjiu could feel a head-splitting headache. She beckoned for Voley, “We had the same dream... Come in, let’s make sense of the matter.”

Voley agreed and quickly climbed up the bus. The four of them sat in a circle. Everything was pretty straightforward. For some unknown reason, the four of them shared the same dream—the surprising thing was despite them dying in their dreams at different times, each of the details in their dreams matched up perfectly.

The “pop” sound that Marcie heard was probably the sound that the duoluozhong which killed Luther made. The duoluozhong must have had run across the bus and landed on the top of the truck. Then, it attacked Luther. Even the event where Lin Sanjiu was hungry mid-way and ate a cookie or the jokes that Voley told Luther. Their recollections corroborated with each other’s.

Hearing the other three of them discussing intensely, Lin Sanjiu raised her head frustratingly, feeling perplexed. She took a deep breath and paused for a moment. “Wait!”

“What’s the matter?” The three of them looked at her in confusion. “Did you get a sudden insight?”

Unexpectedly, Lin Sanjiu asked a totally random question: “Marcie, what is the bus route that public bus takes?”

Marcie thought for a while, “If it isn’t 89, it’s 90. I can’t really remember, but it is those two numbers.”

“Look!” Lin Sanjiu pointed at the route map which was above the exit doors. The various stops on the route could not be seen, but there was only a bright red “2”.

“Was I wrong? Is this bus number 2?” Marcie looked at Lin Sanjiu, puzzled. “But Xiao Jiu, is this very important?”

Lin Sanjiu stared at the numerical “2” for a very long time. Suddenly, she jumped up and swore. “What the f*ck!”

“What’s the matter?” the rest of them asked in succession.

“I was thinking that this looked really familiar. I remembered!” Lin Sanjiu could feel the hair on her neck stand as she continued, “In my... my dream, I saw this! The only difference was that in my ‘dream’, that was a 3 and not a 2!”

She glanced at the three of them, and her tone turned even more serious, “I have lived in this city for many years, and I’ve never seen this sort of thing. All the public bus should just have a bus route! That is to say, this number only appeared afterward!” Almost as if she remembered something, Marcie exclaimed, “Ah!” and covered her mouth.

Lin Sanjiu’s tone was heavy as if it weighed a ton. “You still don’t understand? This means that we are either dreaming right now or the fact that we died was not a dream!”

Luther unconsciously pinched his own arm and responded, “I am a 100% sure that I am not dreaming... That’s weird! If we really did die for one round, why are we still alright now?”

Lin Sanjiu wanted to speak, but her attention was drawn to Voley's quiet voice.

“Those numbers... The previous time was a 3, now it is a 2... Is that a countdown? Does that mean that we have 2 more chances?”

From when the time the four of them had decided to form a group, this was the first time that Lin Sanjiu saw this side of Voley. His head was lowered so she could not see his expression clearly. But somehow, there was a weird indescribable aura about him...

She took a deep breath and said, “I have the same sentiments.”

The atmosphere became tense again as everyone fell silent.

“Is there a time limit to this thing?” Luther held his arm, being the first to break the silence, “If there is one, we can just wait here safely until it is over before we continue our journey. “

Marcie sighed, “I'm afraid it isn't that simple. Sticking to the main topic, what exactly is this? Why is such a thing happening?”

Before Marcie finished lamenting, Voley suddenly interrupted her and spoke in an exceptionally resolute tone, “I feel that we definitely can't just sit here. How would we know if there is really a time limit to this? If we continue waiting, will something else happen? These are all unknown variables. But if we follow our previous path, we already know what the dangers are... so from my perspective, we should set off as before but just be more careful.”

Lin Sanjiu couldn't help looking at Voley again. No matter how many duoluozhongs they would kill, or how many times they escaped death during a dangerous situation. One thing was certainly clear: Everyone that is alive is not dead.

Yet, Lin Sanjiu did experience death once, just now. It was true as can be. It was a death where she lost both her body and consciousness. The shock of death could not be compared to anything she had experienced. Death was a gray cloud which loomed over every human ever since their birth, it was the

unavoidable ultimate fear of the end that no sage could escape.

Lin Sanjiu still shivered when she recalled the moment of her death. On the other hand, Voley could still calmly analyze the situation. She couldn't help praising him: "Voley, I really couldn't tell that you were a person that could still remain so collected after what we've been through."

After he heard her praise, he instantly regained his usual demeanor and gave an unctuous smile, "Hey, I am just an unimportant person, I just have this life. I am happy just to survive, why would I even dare to be weak?"

Lin Sanjiu did not say a word and withdrew her admiration. Voley's words had convinced all of them. They discussed awhile more and quickly came to a conclusion: this time, they would follow what Voley said and be more alert. Since they were prepared this time, all of them should come out of this unharmed, right?

Chapter 26: It's a Universal Law that the Main Character Must Die? (3)

“Firstly, we must have a grasp on that duoluozhong’s movement,” Lin Sanjiu said with a serious face as she looked at her companions, “it all started out when Marcie heard a “pop” sound, right? Where did it come from?”

At this point, their group of four vehicles was parked at the side of the road, in the same succession as before. The four of them stood atop the bus, frowning intensely. Marcie closed her eyes to recall the details, “I was driving and I heard a sound, but I couldn’t tell where it was from. I only knew that it sounded muffled, I think the source was some distance away from my driver’s seat.”

[That would mean that it was from the mid-back segment of the bus...] Lin Sanjiu strolled over to the mid-back of the bus and suddenly exerted her strength and leaped upward from that spot. With her enhanced body—her ability to jump had reached a level that shouldn’t be underestimated—she managed to jump to the height of an adult human. Thereafter, she landed heavily on the metal roof of the bus, but it only made a dull thump.

“It is not possible to hear a sound at this volume if you were driving.” Lin Sanjiu concluded, “A duoluozhong is at least half my weight, right? With this line of reasoning, the fellow must have jumped down from a very high location.”

From a very high location, the few of them frowned as they recalled their previous journey, trying to remember if they had seen any tall buildings.

Suddenly, Marcie asked, “Since the duoluozhong had already landed on my vehicle, why didn’t it kill me? Instead, it abandoned the nearest target and decided to kill Luther. I mean the bus has a large windshield, it would be easy for me to spot it.”

“It probably planned to create a pileup?” Voley looked to his left and right, “If the second vehicle meets with a mishap, the subsequent two vehicles would be in trouble. My car collided with the back of your vehicle... but I was alright.”

“If it wanted to create a pileup, wouldn’t it be faster if he targeted Xiao Jiu?” Luther retorted with a question.

Voley took a deep breath, he thought about it a while longer before giving up. “Who knows? Maybe that duoluozhong is crazy so it just randomly chose you.”

“Will it choose me again this time round? Or will it choose someone else randomly?” Luther felt more and more frustrated as they discussed about it. “D*mn it! This countdown provides too little information. There is no way we can infer about anything!”

“Don’t overthink matters.” Lin Sanjiu walked over and patted his shoulder in a consoling manner. “I think it shouldn’t be too hard to avoid this accident... At least we are certain about the location where it happened. We can stop before we reach the slope. We can survey the area, patrol it. Any duoluozhong we spot, we’ll kill. I don’t believe we can’t overcome this!”

Her resolute and decisive tone immediately raised the confidence of the people in her party. After all, it was just a single duoluozhong!

“That’s right! This time round, we will make a preemptive strike!” Voley agreed with a smile.

After they had made their preliminary plans, they continued with the journey as the scorching night continued. To avoid any other complications, their vehicles were in the same formation. The only difference now as that they had learned a lesson from their previous experience. The windows in their vehicles have been winded down, and each of them now had a weapon beside them which they could readily grab.

They drove slowly throughout their journey, and no one spoke a word. Everyone was fully alert and listened carefully to their surroundings. They did not want to miss even a small hint of unusual activity. Feeling her parched throat, Lin Sanjiu swallowed a mouthful of saliva. Just then, Marcie whispered over the walkie-talkie, "It's here!"

"Stop your vehicles!" Lin Sanjiu shouted into her walkie-talkie. She pressed down on her brake, switched off the ignition, and jumped out of her truck holding her police baton.

The slope where the four of them met that untimely end was just in front of them. The four vehicles were now parked at the bottom of the slope. At the same time, Luther, Marcie, and Voley rushed out of their vehicles. They surrounded the bus with weapons in their hands, and all of them looked up at the roof of the bus at the same time.

There were no street lights in that night deprived of human civilization. However, with the headlights from the Citroën and their evolved night vision, the few of them could see clearly: on the top of the bus, there was a crouching figure of a dark shadow. Seeing that long, constantly moving mouthpart... what else could it be other than a duoluozhong?

Discovering that it was surrounded, the duoluozhong immediately stood up. It turned and ran toward the back of the bus. Lin Sanjiu widened her eyes and inhaled.

The duoluozhong did not show any sign of shrinkage, its body was no different from a normal human!

For it to reach such a state, how many victims did it have to fully drain? Even its speed was the same as a normal person... If it wasn't for the long mouthpart, Lin Sanjiu would have thought that it was a normal person.

"Trying to escape after you've killed me? Dream on!" Luther was the first person to react. He gritted his teeth, and once his feet

pushed away from the ground, he lunged forward like an arrow. In a blink of an eye, he was already some distance away. Lin Sanjiu and Marcie followed suit quickly.

The only person without much fighting capabilities, Voley, ran a few steps after them before stopping to pant. He yelled out toward their back, “I will just keep a lookout here! All of you! You can do it!”

The duoluozhong’s speed was almost on par with a normal person, but were the people chasing it even considered normal? Within half a minute, the three of them had already blocked its path and surrounding it.

The duoluozhong stared at the three of them without moving. The three of them stood on guard. For a moment, nobody initiated any attacks. Facing their enemy in close proximity, the three of them immediately felt a wave of nausea.

The duoluozhong was apparently male, and its body was well-hydrated. Just looking at its body, it was entirely like a normal human being. Not only his body, but it still retained its eyelids over its long slit eyes, its high forehead was also flat and smooth... It looked really normal without a single disgusting feature. However, the undeniable fact was that it had a mouthpart—attached to its normal clean male face. There was a black hole where his nose and mouth should have been, and a large mosquito-like mouthpart extended from the deep hole.

It looked as if it was exactly designed to display such a strange contrast so much so that Lin Sanjiu would rather look at Wang Sisi.

“Why do all of you seem prepared?” a human voice came from the male duoluozhong’s mouthpart, there was even a revolting hint of a smile in its eyes. “I just arrived, and all of you stopped your vehicles at once? Who sent you a message?”

[Why... does it seem like it was implying that there were other

duoluozhong?]

“I don’t like to have a rubbish conversation with non-human creatures.” This thought flashed through Lin Sanjiu head. Without much planning, Lin Sanjiu smiled, and a white light flashed in her palm a couple of times. There was suddenly a few cards in her left hand.

This was a new technique she had developed after testing her ability multiple times.

As she waved her left hand, she threw out five thin cards which immediately flew straight ahead following her intentions. They rapidly close in on the duoluozhong. Next, the five cards dispersed in mid-air, arranging themselves to target the duoluozhong’s anterior.

That’s right. Lin Sanjiu could control the speed and trajectory of the cards in mid-air. This was a formidable technique; unfortunately, there was a great limitation. At her current state, she could only control the cards for five seconds...

Quicker than words could describe, and before the duoluozhong realized the situation it was facing, the five cards accelerated and directly headed toward the duoluozhong’s vital points. Just when they were about to touch its skin, the five cards turned in sharp razor blades at the same time.

As it dodged and countered, not all five blades struck their target, but one of the razor blades pierced deeply into the duoluozhong’s left eyes. A sharp shriek rang out in the night sky, and the duoluozhong’s mouthpart trembled uncontrollably in mid-air.

“Quick! This is our chance!” Luther rushed forward brandishing a police baton. He landed a heavy strike. With a dreadful sound, the duoluozhong’s chin was shattered.

It was practically clear that the duoluozhong had to die here today. As that thought rose in his mind, Luther suddenly saw a

reflective shine from the corner of his eyes.

It was immediately followed by an explosive “bang!” which sounded like a gunshot. The reflective shine extended into a straight line and shot towards Voley’s chest like a meteorite.

The color drained from his face, and he desperately reached for his mobile phone. But just as he summoned it out, a mist of blood burst forth from his chest cavity, and his body and phone fell heavily to the ground at the same time. Subsequently, Voley snatched his last breath with widened eyes as his mobile phone disappeared with a white light on the spot.

Everything happened too quickly. The three of them who were engaged in combat with the duoluozhong could not react fast enough. They stared at Voley’s body, stunned. Using that opportunity, the duoluozhong dared not continue the fight. Instead, he did a flip, escaped their encirclement and turned to run.

Lin Sanjiu was about to poise herself to chase after it. Suddenly, an alarm exploded in her mind. Before she could even respond, she dropped to the ground and rolled to a side. Another gunshot rang out. There was now a hole in the ground where she was previously standing, and white smoke rose from it.

This time, she fully understood the situation.

“We are being sniped at! All of you, look for a place to hide! Quick!”

Marcie and Luther flung themselves toward the bus and hid behind it while Lin Sanjiu crouched behind the Citroën. They were all panting. After the other party had lost sight of their target, the sound of gunshots stopped. The night fell back to a still silence.

“Mr. Vo... Voley is dead...” Marcie whispered sounding like it was something that was somewhat difficult to accept.

“It must be done by that duoluozhong’s accomplices, right?” Lin

Sanjiu could feel her heart palpating as if it was about to burst out from her chest. “We are really unlucky. We actually met a duoluozhong that knows how to snipe!”

Luther gave her a complicated look and shook his head. “It is not done by that duoluozhong... I saw it just now. In the building on the left, I saw spots of metallic light. The ‘bullet’ that hit Voley was one of the spots of the lights.”

Hearing what he described, the two others looked at him with widened eyes. “Isn’t that an evolved ability?”

Unquestionably, evolved abilities can only be used by humans.

Luther replied bitterly, “That’s right, it must be an evolved scum who partnered with that duoluozhong.”

Momentarily, Lin Sanjiu was unable to digest that information. “Partnered? Partnering with a duoluozhong? What did he stand to gain?”

Just as she said this, she heard a thump above her head.

She instinctively looked upward only to see that duoluozhong which had fled just moments before. It was standing on the roof of the Citroën... Its long mouthpart was dangling beside Lin Sanjiu’s shoulder.

Chapter 27: It Was Simply a Death Full of Grievances

“Lookie here! Isn’t this the missus who stabbed one of my eyes? Aren’t you going to run? My attack range is really wide. I think you will have to run... over there if you want to avoid getting stabbed by me.”

Under Lin Sanjiu’s horror-filled gaze, the duoluozhong did not attack. Instead, it pointed to an empty patch not far from her. His words were interjected with frivolous laughter, and he narrowed his long slit-like eyes in an exceedingly unpleasant manner. [When it was human, it should have been a repulsive man] somehow, this thought flashed through Lin Sanjiu’s mind.

She stared unwaveringly in the direction of the duoluozhong, her palm flashed with a white light, and she held another handful of cards. Despite the fact that her body was slightly trembling from her intense nervousness, she forced herself to stay in the same spot.

It was a joke if it thought that she would run out to the open space, allowing herself to get sniped! She was not stupid!

With such proximity, she could only strike first! Once again, Lin Sanjiu threw the cards in her hand toward the duoluozhong. However, the duoluozhong was prepared this round. It took a step back and swiftly deflected most of the cards with its mouthpart. The single card that it dodge was summoned back to Lin Sanjiu’s hand. But when she took a glance, she could not help silently swearing.

Of all cards, that remaining card was a support card which was used in tandem with the razor blades. It was a 【Black Cloth】used for obstructing the enemies line of view. She had finished all the razor blades in her arsenal this round. The razor blades that she used were now on the ground. If she wanted to use them again, she

had to touch them. Otherwise, she had no other method of retrieving them back.

In that one month, she consciously kept many items as cards. However, with this incident, she was only left with various items that were useless in this situation...

Looking at the card in Lin Sanjiu's hand, the duoluozhong merely squinched its remaining eye. It walked to the edge of the car roof and started chuckling menacingly.

Lin Sanjiu expected it to say something, but suddenly it swung its mouthpart and thrust it toward her. In that instant, she realized that she was too close to the mouthpart. She simply could not evade it if she did not run outward!

Marcie gave a shout of dismay as Lin Sanjiu rolled outward in desperation. She felt a burning sensation on her shoulder. In the end, she was still scratched by the mouthpart, and a bloody wound appeared on her shoulder.

Pressing down on her wounded shoulder, her eyes swept involuntarily to the building opposite them. She only realized then that she had already rolled away from her cover and was now exposed.

[No, it is too dangerous!] With a single thought, the 【Black Cloth】 flew up in the air and opened up with a quick whoosh.

At almost the same time, sounds of gunshots rang in the air after that brief silence. Two consecutive shots were fired. Thanks to the distraction brought about by the movement of the black cloth, the sniper lost focus. One of the rays of light created a hole in the ground beside her. Unfortunately, the second shot pierced through Lin Sanjiu's knee in an instant. It hurt so much that she let out a cry of pain. It was impossible for her to stand, so she just laid on the same spot gasping for air.

“You motherf*cker!” Witnessing that scene, Luther could not

control himself. He leaped out, holding the police baton in his hand, and yelled out as he swung a violent blow toward the duoluozhong.

At the same time, Marcie lunged herself toward where Lin Sanjiu was lying. She planned to pull Lin Sanjiu to safety. The latter was just lying defenselessly on the ground. With another ray of light, that will certainly be the end for Lin Sanjiu. However, just when Marcie grabbed her hand, preparing to drag her behind the car. The sniper rifle rang out again.

Lin Sanjiu watched helplessly as a mist of blood erupted from Marcie's chest, and tiny red droplets sprayed across her face.

"Marcie?" she called out in a daze.

Through Marcie's lifeless light brown eyes, Lin Sanjiu could see the reflection of her own pale distraught face. In the next instant, Marcie's dead body, stripped of all support, fell heavily onto Lin Sanjiu. Her tears gushed out as the dead body landed on her.

Even though she had already experienced it once, the death of a companion still brought her unbearable grief.

"Marcie!" Luther, who was not far from them, yelled out furiously like an injured creature.

Lin Sanjiu's heart dropped for a second, she mustered all her strength and shouted loudly, "Don't come here, hide!"

But Luther turned a deaf ear to her advice, he waved his police baton pushing back the duoluozhong, then turned and rushed over. Within a second, he plopped down kneeling beside the two of them.

Luther looked at the dead body, unable to speak for quite a while. He was already exposed, but there was no sound of gunshot unlike what Lin Sanjiu expected. Besides, Luther seemed to have forgotten that—he reached them and touched Marcie's hair with his trembling hands. He let out a sob and looked at Lin Sanjiu with

reddened pleading eyes, “Let’s restart this. We still have one more chance. Marcie... Marcie is my family...”

The fresh red numeral flashed in front of her eyes. Suddenly, she felt a chill in her heart: [Do they really have one more chance? So far, everything was just a conjecture! What if it wasn’t a countdown and everyone just had a precognitive dream?]

Luther’s eyes glistened with tears, under the night sky, they shimmered with a pleading hope. Looking at his eyes, Lin Sanjiu practically could not bring herself to express her doubts.

“Okay...” she averted her gaze, forcing the word out of her mouth, but did not receive any response.

She lifted her eyes only to see that Luther’s face was now rigid and had turned an unprecedented ashen white.

Lin Sanjiu felt instantly crushed; like a crumbling ice tower. She stared fixedly at Luther’s face, calling his name urgently, “Luther, Luther! Say something! Talk to me!”

Emptiness shrouded Luther’s eyes as blood seeped out of his mouth. His limp body flopped over Marcie, revealing a blood-covered mouthpart piecing his fair white neck.

“Wow! Even when they die, they have to die together. I am so moved by such friendship. But are you all scared out of your wits? Restart this? Don’t tell me you believe that you can resurrect the dead?” The duoluozhong’s long, sinister eye gleamed with satisfaction. “Missus, don’t cry. Every bit of moisture from your body is extremely precious to me.”

Only then did Lin Sanjiu realized that she was crying wordlessly. Comparing the gravity of having witnessed her friends die one by one in front of her, that so-called chance was ever so illusive!

She could no longer feel the pain from her wound. The duoluozhong took its own sweet time pulling out its mouthpart and approaching her. Lin Sanjiu strained her eyes, staring at the

building across the road. There were four or five metallic spots of light behind the window of an unknown level. The view behind the window was largely covered by a curtain so she could only make out a vague figure of a person whom gender she could not tell.

[Before I die, I must find out at least which story the gunshots were fired from.] Lin Sanjiu thought to herself. One, two, three... seven, eight...

“I bet you didn’t expect that there was another person there, right? How is it? My woman’s ability is not bad, huh?” Following her gaze, the duoluozhong turned back to Lin Sanjiu and said almost boastfully. His tone dripped with conceit.

Lin Sanjiu could not hear anything else clearly. Her mind was only occupied with the counting in her head. When she counted to twelve, through her eyes clouded by her unstoppable tears, she saw the mouthpart covered in Luther’s fresh blood. It rose in front of her. Her world suddenly became dark and blurry. Her consciousness dissipated into nothingness just like mere vapors.

.....

“Has he left?” an unfamiliar male voice suddenly came from somewhere.

“Yeah. In the end, I could not resist using ‘that thing’,” another man replied. “This turned out as expected. “From what I see, these people have quite the potential. Who would have known that they would meet opponents much stronger than them at the get-go? They’re unlucky. If I don’t use it now, I might not be able to use it the next time!”

“Sh*t, that’s mine! We have to catch him...” the man gritted his teeth and said.

“Hey, look. This is a rare ‘growth type’!”

“Tut, tut. That’s true...”

“So... do you want to help them?”

The indistinct voices of the two strangers drifted away. Lin Sanjiu had totally slipped into an unconscious darkness. It was the “death” that she had already experienced once...

Second round: another complete wipeout.

Chapter 28: The Names of These Worlds Are Too Weird

“What the hell happened!”

As the female voice cursed angrily, she gave a violent kick to the door of the bus with her boots on. The exit door of the bus immediately rattled in its frame. The bright red numerical “1” above it still hung steadily above it.

Behind Lin Sanjiu was Marcie, who sighed with a lowered head, and Luther who had just calmed down from his fury.

“Does this mean that we only have one chance left?” Lin Sanjiu took a deep breath. Her bloodshot eyes glowered, and her unfathomable fury grew. “Who are the people responsible for all that f*ckery behind our backs!”

“Xiao Jiu, don’t be so mad. If we looked at it from another perspective, perhaps we were saved by that countdown. Otherwise, we would have all been dead,” Marcie consoled her softly but was still at a loss as to what they would do next.

Even though it might be true, momentarily, Lin Sanjiu found it difficult to accept. She could not help feeling that someone was toying with them... she tried her best to curb her anger as both her hands clenched the sides of her pants tightly.

After some time, she suddenly stood up. “I am going out for a walk.”

Luther massaged his temples as if he had a headache, his expression was not any better.

She walked a few steps away from the bus while the night wind spat waves of sand at her. The slight pain made Lin Sanjiu deeply aware that she was still alive. Silence surrounded her, without a single hint of noise, it was so quiet that she could even hear the blood flowing through the vessels in her ears. This was perhaps the

reason why her intense emotions gradually waned.

[It's so quiet. But, isn't it a little too quiet?]

She kept feeling like something was amiss.

Lin Sanjiu knitted her brows as her gaze drifted to the dirty Citroën a short distance away from her.

[That's right... During the previous two times, Voley would have already gone over to wake us up by this time. But why didn't we hear his mobile phone alarm? Could it be that he hasn't woken up?]

Just as that thought occurred to her, Lin Sanjiu strode quickly to the Citroën and began calling out a little worriedly, "Voley! Are you awake?"

After she waited for a while, she still heard no activity from the car.

She could not wait any longer. She wiped the car's dirt-covered windshield with her sleeve, then bent over and peeked inside.

The front passenger seat was reclined backward and used as a bed. There were packets of half-eaten food, empty water bottles, and some dirty clothes. The only thing missing was Voley, himself.

Lin Sanjiu felt herself getting anxious, she surveyed the area as she circled the group of parked vehicles. There was only a vast emptiness around them. The trees had long turned to ashes so she had an unobstructed view which stretched as far as she could see. Unfortunately, even after she had walked two rounds around the area, she could not even spot a single footprint of Voley.

Coincidentally, Luther and Marcie were getting off the bus while chatting. When Lin Sanjiu heard them, she quickly ran over to them yelling, "Voley is not in his car, he's missing! Should we go look for him?"

They were stunned, they never expected that Voley would go

missing. Marcie opened her mouth and was just about to speak when they heard a lethargic voice coming from the roof of the bus.

“I’d say, you shouldn’t look for him. You probably won’t find him anyway.”

The three of them were shocked by the voice as they instinctively took a couple of steps back and looked up at the roof. Against the large silver white moon that hung in the night sky, they could see two dark figures: one of them was standing, and the other was sitting down. They did not even realize when these men arrived. The torrid night wind swept past the two figures, it was difficult to make out their faces as their shadows melted into the moonlight.

From what it seemed, the person who spoke previously was the one sitting down. He appeared to be rather relaxed as one of his legs dangled from the roof. “Why are all of you looking at me like that? So you also think that I’m good-looking?” he quipped.

The three of them were dumbfounded for a moment; Lin Sanjiu opened her mouth and asked, “What did you do to Vo—”

Just then, the man who was standing made a quiet scoffing sound interrupting her; suddenly he stepped forward into the moonlight and leaped upward. The dark figure landed impactfully on the ground, stirring up a cloud of dust.

The man had a tall and sturdy stature, his muscular body was like that of a wild beast, exuding a dangerous aura of pent-up energy. He carried a long, slightly curved sword on his back, which appeared to resemble a katana. But he lacked a scabbard which made it a mystery how he actually attached the sword to his back. The metal-forged blade of his sword glimmered faintly in the dark.

For posthumans, jumping down from the roof of a bus wasn’t something complicated—but somehow, something about that man raised Lin Sanjiu and the others’ alarm, and they slipped into defensive postures. The man lifted his head, and he lifted a corner of his mouth slowly, revealing to the three of them a smile which

one would call malicious.

In an instant, an imposing pressure like they had never experienced before swept toward them like a wave of a tsunami. As if the person had drawn out all the air from the atmosphere, the three of them even stopped breathing for a second. It became difficult for them to even stand as they were assaulted by that pressure—Marcie tried to hold her position, but she was the first one to be unable to withstand it and fell on the ground with a plop as her face turned white.

With a face brimming with defiance, his forehead was covered in cold sweat as he was forced into a half-kneel position.

Lin Sanjiu felt as though the man in front of her was squeezing her heart in his hand, every strained muscle in her body throbbed to keep her propped up. She trembled as she tried her best to resist the urge to turn and run away. She felt practically like a hare that had encountered a cougar in the prairies. It was a sort of despair that arose from her powerlessness—they were definitely on different levels on the food chain.

By this point, Lin Sanjiu's Keen Senses was fully triggered, and all the cells in her body were screaming to her, "Run! Run! Run!"

Just when she was about to give in to her impulse to turn and run away, the man, who was still sitting while he spoke, leaped off the roof landing lightly. A breeze, like a wind in Spring which appears from nowhere, sending away the frost of winter and bringing to bloom a million pear blossoms, lightly washed over Lin Sanjiu's face. The seemingly murderous intent which hung heavily in the air immediately abated.

Once he landed, he chided, "Why did you scare them?" Thereafter, he turned to look at the three of them consoling, "Everything's fine. It is just a bad habit of his. You don't have to be afraid."

The man with the katana on his back harrumphed, he countered

coldly, “That’s cos they’re weak as sh*t.”

“Who are you guys?” Lin Sanjiu asked as her heartbeat gradually stabilized. The more she heard their voice, the more familiar they sounded. “Why did you look for us?”

Luther went over to help Marcie back up on her feet. Hearing Lin Sanjiu question, he quickly added, “And what did you mean when you say that we shouldn’t look for Voley?”

Even though he was young, he was very insightful. Once that man with a gentle voice jumped down, he immediately noticed that the two men had no intention of harming them.

Judging from the situation, if that man with the fierce gaze wanted to kill them, he might only need less than 30 seconds.

The man who was sitting down moments before was actually as good-looking as he claimed. He had white dazzling teeth, and his smile reminded them of a peach blossom petal.

Seeing the slightly pitiable state that the three of them were in, he suddenly exclaimed, smiling, “I guess you have no idea what situation you are in?”

The three to them did not reply. The man with the katana suddenly chipped, “Not only weak but stupid.”

Lin Sanjiu reacted with a frown, but with the shreds of fear that still persisted, she finally bit her lips and kept quiet.

“They are new to this after all...” Mr. Peach Blossom mediated. Facing the few of them, he said, “Alright, alright. I will tell you everything from the start. From the looks of it, all of you haven’t really experienced much of the New Worlds?”

Luther looked at Marcie then he replied hesitantly, “We have gone through two New Worlds, and this is the first time for Xiao Jiu.”

When he heard this, Mr. Peach Blossom was taken aback, he

gazed at them with widened eyes, “Two? You experienced two E-level worlds consecutively?”

“What’s an E-level world?” Luther asked, perplexed.

“Huh?” A troubled expression appeared on Mr. Peach Blossom’s face. “Really! I didn’t expect that we will meet total newbies. Listen. All the parallel universes inflicted with the New World phenomenon are classified into five levels, from E to A, based on survival difficulty. I think you all must have played video games before? Right, it’s like a game. If you ask me how they are classified, I can only say that people from somewhere do that. You wouldn’t know even if I told you. Anyway, for everyone to better adapt to the New Worlds, they are segregated into five levels, and E-level is the most leisurely.”

When she heard the word “leisurely”, Marcie’s expression instantly changed but eventually, she still remained silent. On the other hand, Luther was quick to retort. His fair face was flushed, but he suppressed his anger saying, “Most leisurely? Do you know how many people died in that war-ridden world? When all the soldiers of suitable conscription age died, the ones fighting on the battlefield were just children who were just a bag of bones. You call that leisurely!”

“As a normal person, being able to survive that long after an apocalyptic event, it really is a relaxing world.” Mr. Peach Blossom smiled coldly as if to aggravate him further. “You must know, it is almost worthless to be a Posthuman living in any worlds above E-level because they are that unpredictable. You might survive today, but you might not survive tomorrow... just like you guys. “

“What level is... Hyperthermal Hell?” Lin Sanjiu couldn’t help asking.

Mr. Peach Blossom eyed her for a moment, and replied with a smile, “D-level.”

Lin Sanjiu turned pale. [If this place which had already killed us

twice is only D-level, how are the worlds that are C-level and above?] When she thought of this, she asked with a slight tremble in her voice, “How do you determine these levels?”

“About that, it is related to the current situation you’re all in.” Mr. Peach Blossom reverted back to his easygoing smile. “In all New Worlds that are E-level and above, there is a random chance that... uh... how should I put it... an area-based trap will appear. We call these ‘pocket dimensions’.”

“Pocket dimensions?” The three of them parroted after him.

“It is just a term, it doesn’t really matter. Just that this is the most commonly used term. A pocket dimension presents all sorts of life-threatening challenges... just like in video games, and you can only exit a dungeon after you have successfully cleared that stage. For this particular pocket dimension, the counter will fall every time you die. When you’ve used up all three chances, you will really die then.”

“So... we really only have one chance left!” Lin Sanjiu said in a daze.

“That’s right,” unexpectedly, it was the man with the katana that replied. “Your performance in the last two rounds was so pathetic that it makes me want to cry.”

Lin Sanjiu accepted the humiliation silently, swallowing her words. It was true, they suffered a total defeat twice, that was a little...

Noticing that their morale fell to the bottom with a single sentence from his companion, Mr. Peach Blossom grimaced, “It’s not really your fault. Your opponents are way more experienced... Let me introduce myself, I am Li Zhijun, he’s Hei Zeji. This round, we’ll help you.”

Translator Notes: Peach blossoms are related to one’s love fortune in Chinese Astrology and sometimes used to describe

people who are attractive to the opposite sex.

Chapter 29: Discussing Pocket Dimensions and Wiping out the Other Team

[The names of these two people are... weird enough,] Lin Sanjiu roasted them silently in her heart.

“Are you Japanese?” Luther asked Hei Zeji inquisitively, seeming to have forgotten that just moments before they were being threatened by that man.

“What?” the latter replied in an irritated manner, frowning and showing Luther a “what-the-hell-are-you-talking-about?” look.

“Well... Japanese are... how should I put it... that is...”

“Maybe in their world, they adopt a different convention in naming their children? We can’t try to comprehend using our past experience and logic!” Noticing that Hei Zeji face was become darker by the second, Lin Sanjiu deeply feared that Hei Zeji would just grab his katana and sliced open Luther if that young man asked any more questions. She quickly changed the subject, “I just want to ask... what happened to our companion, Voley?”

Just as she finished her question, an intense overbearing murderous intent erupted from Hei Zeji’s body. Unprepared, the pressure forced the three of them onto the ground again. Li Zhijun hastily helped the two ladies up. He turned to his companion and complained, “Can you please control your ability!”

Hei Zeji looked displeased, but the overwhelming pressure and the display of strength finally dissipated. Luther, who did not receive any help because he was a male, stood up by himself and silently dust the dirt off his body.

Li Zhijun gestured for everyone to board the bus to continue their conversation. He found a seat and sat down lazily. He casually scanned the bus and helped himself to a packet of chocolate cookies. While he started eating, he finally spoke, “Your

friend called Tian Minbo escaped from us.”

That caught Lin Sanjiu’s attention.

“Honestly speaking, to us entering this D-level world was something we didn’t expect. Arriving in this low-level New World, we actually planned to treat it as a vacation...” Li Zhijun beamed as he pointed to his companion, “But, some time back, this guy somehow developed a sudden compassion. He insisted on saving a man from another pocket dimension. And, that man was your Voley.”

When he saw the disbelief on everyone’s faces, Hei Zeji’s face turned even darker.

“Tian Minbo claimed that he admired us and wanted to be our lackey, swearing that he will follow us to his death. It was impossible to get rid of him. He really seemed rather eager, so I let him follow us for a period of time.” Li Zhijun sighed, vexation filled his limpid eyes, “Who would have thought? After he had grown closer to us, he stole an important item from Zeji when we let our guard down for a moment and escaped in the night.”

Hearing this, the three of them were stunned. From their display of power, Li Zhijun and his companion had no reason to lie. That would only mean...

Lin Sanjiu thought about it for a moment and looked at Luther and Marcie, holding back her anger. “He said that he was looking for companions. So from the start, he already planned to use us as his human shields?”

Before the two of them could reply, Li Zhijun’s responded with his laid-back voice, “I reckon that was his scheme. He had witnessed how I chased down others so he probably knew that he couldn’t go far by himself. So he thought that I wouldn’t be able to catch him just because he joined a team... how he underestimated us... Ha! I can find him even if he enters a pocket dimension.”

Marcie ran her fingers through her red hair and asked doubtfully, “So where is he now? Why isn’t he together with us?”

Li Zhijun did not say a word; instead, he glanced over at his companion.

“It is because of that item he stole,” Hei Zeji suddenly spoke, his gaze was cold and vicious. “That is a special item which I spent a great deal of effort finding, it allows its user to forcefully break out from a pocket dimension.”

When he said that, the three of them immediately looked at him wide-eyed. There wasn’t a need to explain how precious that item was, especially as Lin Sanjiu and the others only had one last chance at survival.

[If one could forcefully break out of a pocket dimension, doesn’t that mean that they could gain an additional life!]

The three of them had almost changed their opinion about Hei Zeji when they heard that he saved Voley once. However, the next moment, they witnessed a cold, calculating smile appearing at the side of his mouth, “Once I get my item back, I am going to personally stuff him into an A-level pocket dimension.”

His calm tone was just like a predator making an opportune move as it hid in the jungle and oozed with danger. Lin Sanjiu shuddered for a second, involuntarily.

“There is a limit to the item, it can only be used 15 times. Otherwise, he would have abandoned all of you much earlier during the second round. It is not that easy to find human shields around.” Li Zhijun narrowed his eyes and sighed.

With those words, Luther, being the upright young man he was, jumped up furiously. His face turned red with anger, “When we find that son of a b*tch, I am going to give him the thrashing of his life! Brother Jun, if there is any way we can help, just let us know!”

Seeing Li Zhijun cheerful expression, Lin Sanjiu rolled her eyes in

her heart. She coughed and said softly, “Luther, sit down. Our top priority is to survive and escape this pocket dimension.”

“Right, since we are talking about this... Entry into a pocket dimension is only possible at the point of commencement, so myself and Ah Ji are actually ‘illegal entrants’. We can’t actually help you in battle...” Li Zhijun’s fox-like eyes narrowed with his smile, “So we will provide you intel and play a supporting role. You can come up with your strategy. After we exit this pocket dimension, we still need a favor from all of you.”

Lin Sanjiu eyed him for a moment and felt a little indecisive.

[There is no such thing as a free lunch. This Li Zhijun might be smiling, but he doesn’t seem like he’ll be an easy person to deal with. Who knows what he will ask from us as repayment for their kindness?]

But putting things in perspective, the three of them were in no position to negotiate. As she thought of this point, she gritted her teeth and gave a light nod to Luther and Marcie.

“Let’s do this.”

Once the decision was made, the few of them started discussing their strategy.

The information that Li Zhijun and Hei Zeji provided was so detailed that it was as though they knew the opponents personally. According to the duo, they managed to gather all the relevant intel about the opponents just after circling that area for a few rounds.

Sure enough, just as what they had inferred during the second round, they were ambushed by a two-man team. The first member was a duoluozhong who always patrolled around the few blocks of buildings, and the other member was a human who was hiding on the 15th floor. Other than the fact that the duoluozhong was well-nourished, and retained its normal build. They basically did not need to fear it. The one who was truly dangerous was actually that

woman.

Currently, the woman had already developed two skills— sniping and setting traps.

Lin Sanjiu's party had already experienced the power of her sniping skills, and it was different from how military snipers worked. The metallic ray from that woman used was like a bullet; however, she neither faced any issues with accuracy associated with gun precision nor required a long time to take aim. All she had to do was to lock onto the target with her eyes and pull the trigger.

No matter how good Lin Sanjiu physical capabilities were, she hadn't reached the stage where she could be faster than a bullet.

Furthermore, the greatest weakness of a sniper—close combat—was solved perfectly by her ability to lay traps.

"I actually wanted to head upstairs to take a look, but once I stepped into the building, I was shocked. From the first story all the way to the fifteen story, the entire floors were covered with her traps. Even though it wasn't difficult to destroy those traps, but our illegal status will definitely be discovered," Li Zhijun continued, "you must know, we can't engage in a battle, because we will only be on the receiving end of the attacks."

"What sort of traps are these?" Lin Sanjiu asked feeling slightly anxious.

"I have no idea." Li Zhijun shrugged, "Didn't I tell you, I didn't try to set them off."

Lin Sanjiu gave him a look of frustration, "So you are saying, we shouldn't head upstairs, right?" Li Zhijun nodded calmly.

[How were we going to fight if we can't go upstairs!] Lin Sanjiu could not help feeling disheartened.

"There is one more information you should all know." Beaming, Li Zhijun passed Lin Sanjiu and Marcie each a bottle of water, "In

this pocket dimension, only your group retains memories of the previous rounds.”

The three of them instantly lifted their heads to listen.

“Even though yourselves and they entered the same pocket dimension, but them being on the ‘attack team’ do not have any consciousness that they are in a pocket dimension. They were just doing what they planned to do on the same day when they first entered the pocket dimension, and that is to hunt,” Li Zhijun looked more and more excited as he said this, “that is to say, if you attacked today, you will still catch them off guard. If you strategize this right, your counterattacks should definitely work...”

Perhaps it was the unruffled manner in which Li Zhijun had explained that, but the faint fear that surrounded their hearts seemed to have lessened.

Li Zhijun went through with them once again all the various points that they should pay attention to. After that, deciding that it should be sufficient, he called to the sleepy Hei Zeji that it was time for them to alight.

“It is up to us now.” Looking as the two of them walked into the distance, Lin Sanjiu looked at Luther and Marcie with her bright eyes, and said in a determined voice, “We will definitely survive!”

Translator note: The Chinese characters and thus the original pronunciation of names Li Zhijun and Hei Zeji are rather unique sounding names, but the romanization does not reflect this.

Chapter 30: Luther Goes in for the Attack

Luther spent almost an hour walking the distance covered over their 20 mins drive the last two rounds.

According to Li Zhijun's intel, the duoluozhong would usually pace around the building that it stayed in, looking for people who had wandered away from their groups. However, Luther had already walked a few rounds around the area about 500m away from that particular building. Yet, he did not even catch a glimpse of any duoluozhong—

“So it seems like that chap is quite prudent, it is not willing to stray far from the building,” Luther heard Lin Sanjiu's pensive voice over the walkie-talkie. “In that case, you can go a little closer. Just remember, you must hide yourself if you spot it, then you know what you'll have to do, right?”

Luther replied, “Uh-huh. Don't worry! I have the relevant experience.”

“Okay, let's keep in contact.”

He switched off and kept the walkie-talkie, then he slowly approached the building where their opponents were located in. He activated his Eagle Eye ability to its maximum capability so that he would immediately discover anything amiss in the area.

Luther exhaled slowly as his heart raced. The highlight of their battle today was all on him, so he was feeling the mounting pressure.

As he cautiously headed for the building, Luther did not forget even for a second to seek cover each step of the way. If he was spotted by that woman and sniped down even before he found the duoluozhong, it would be such a waste... Thankfully, Luther had learned quite a few stealth techniques during his year in that war-ridden world, so he did this quite skillfully.

The building which harbored the sniper stood out from the rest of the surrounding apartments. Many buildings within the area were still intact, there were quite a few six, seven-story residential apartments, and the street which was usually bustling with small shops and business was now dead—even the dead bodies had already turned to dust.

The silhouette of a man with a long hanging shadow from his face suddenly swung round the corner without any warning, it dragged its feet sluggishly. Luther's heart missed a beat, as he immediately shrunk backward, hiding behind a sand-covered signboard.

Estimating that the duoluozhong should not be able to hear him from his position, Luther switched on his walkie-talkie.

"I spotted it," he said as quietly as possible. "Xiao Jiu, are you sure that it called that sniper 'his woman' previously?"

"Yes. I am a 100% sure of it."

"Okay, then I'll start."

Once he had said that Luther locked onto the duoluozhong which looked rather carefree. "Girlfriend," he said silently in his mind. Almost instantaneously, Luther observed that locks of luscious black hair fell over his shoulders like a waterfall. No matter how many times he had transformed, each new form was a refreshing experience for him. He reached out to touch his smooth hair and his small, exquisite face. He realized that his hands were now fair and dainty, and he was even wearing an expensive looking bracelet on his hand.

"I succeeded... Hey, I think this guy's girlfriend is little Ms. Perfect, fair-skinned, rich, and beautiful," Luther chuckled over the walkie-talkie, "She's not bad. She has big boobs, a thin waist, and long hair..."

The two women on the other side of his walkie-talkie scoffed.

From the background, he could hear Marcie mumbling about puberty or something. Lin Sanjiu voice was clear, but she sounded rather exasperated, “Can’t you be a little more serious? Alright, get out there... Hey... Li, Li Zhijun, what are you doing?”

A cackling noise followed her shocked voice as if the walkie-talkie had been snatched from her. The next moment, he could hear Li Zhijun shouting sternly over the walkie-talkie, “Don’t go out!”

Luther froze as he had just taken a step in his red mid heels

“I have seen that sniper. She is not beautiful, she is an average looking woman with cropped hair!” Li Zhijun continued anxiously, “You changed into the wrong person! Hey? Hey! Can you hear me...”

No matter how he yelled, he did not receive a response—because Luther had already silently switched off the walkie-talkie. Li Zhijun’s warning was still a step late.

Just when Luther stepped out from his cover, of all times, it just had to be when the duoluozhong turned to look over. Within the time that Li Zhijun took to say those words, the duoluozhong had already rushed over happily. From its speed, it will only take about ten seconds for the two of them to meet face-to-face.

Luther contained his nervousness and remained in his position as he quickly kept the walkie-talkie. Following which, he crossed his arms and held his shoulders crying out “Ahh!” using the woman’s voice, acting like he was afraid.

Just as he expected, the duoluozhong suddenly stopped in its track just as it was about to reach Luther. Even that long horrendous mouthpart could not hide its surprise: “Meiye?”

Luther looked up with a face full of fear, he revealed his beautiful, endearing feminine face. His white face was covered with streaks of tears. The next words from the duoluozhong immediately confirmed that Lin Sanjiu’s information was not

wrong, it was just a godd*mn accidental mishap.

“Meiye? Why are you here? Where is your boyfriend?”

[Oh f*ck!] At this point, this was the only thing Luther wanted to say. Lin Sanjiu did not know the largest shortcoming of his ability. Luther had to state the relationship between his form and the target to activate his ability. In reality, he could only transform into the person that fits the criterion of that relationship based on how his target really feels. Apparently, the duoluozhong did not acknowledge in his heart that the sniper was his girlfriend. Instead, this woman called Meiye, who already had a boyfriend, was who it recognized as his true girlfriend.

[That’s why I hate these sort of people with complicated romantic relationships!] Luther grumbled inwardly. Despite that, he retained his fearful and pitiful looking expression, “I, I lost contact with him... But how did you become like this?”

The duoluozhong looked up and down, trying to size up the woman in front of him. Thereafter, it immediately smiled and said, “I evolved and gained a body alteration ability. I don’t look great right now, but I am quite powerful.”

To maximize the effectiveness of his Shapeshifting, Luther had spent a significant amount of effort polishing his acting skills. Despite knowing that the duoluozhong was full of nonsense, he still managed to nod his head, as if he was a little frightened, and diverted his gaze away from the mouthpart. “This world now is so scary...” he sobbed spasmodically.

“What about your dad? He’s so rich, he must have a backup plan,” the duoluozhong asked casually. “And, have you evolved? What abilities did you gain?” it asked excitably.

[So that’s how it is.] Luther sneered in his heart.

“We have an... underground bunker stocked with food and water. I hid there all this time. If you need to, you can come over,”

Luther observed its expression secretly as he said this. Seeing that the duoluozhong did not show any reaction to the words, “food and water”, he continued, “as for my abilities. I think I only have a heat-resistance ability and nothing else.”

Now, the duoluozhong’s expression started to change. At the start, a flash of disappointment seemed like it was trying to smile. The muscles under the duoluozhong eyes wrinkled together as it narrowed its eyes. “So you don’t have other abilities? So why did you come out here?”

Before Luther could think of an answer, it continued speaking, “Let me see, why don’t you follow me back? I will protect you? How’s that?”

As it said this, that uncomfortable half-smile on its face became more visible.

[Do you plan to consume me after we go back? Or slowly rear me like a livestock?] Luther mocked in his mind, yet he had an “I’m saved” expression on his face. “That’s great! I will just follow you,” as he wept gratefully.

The duoluozhong primped himself and actually gestured for Luther to walk first. Luther smiled at it shyly like a girl and walked ahead. The duoluozhong followed behind.

Deep in the night, their unhurried footsteps filled the empty streets. “Meiye, do you still remember when we first met?” the duoluozhong asked from behind him.

Luther felt his heart skip a beat. His shapeshifting skills did not provide him any sort of information, so he just muttered a sound of affirmation.

“When I first saw you, I knew you were that you were the right person for me.” That well-nourished duoluozhong which had no worries about food actually had the mood to recall its good memories. “Do you remember? We were so happy together.”

“Y... yes.”

“Because you liked the beach, we went to Boracay, the Maldives, Tahiti... all those places. When I think about that, the time spent with you was just like a dream,” as it continued talking, something else crept into its voice, “If only your dad didn’t intervene. Haha. I admit that you had spent a lot during the time when we were together. But, I was truly in love with you.”

Luther was actually clueless about what to say next. After he had thought about it for a moment, he started sobbing fakely, “I understand.”

“You understand? If you understood my feelings, why did you end up with that second-generation heir? You are just like your father, you think that I am not good enough for you, right!?” the duoluozhong suddenly raised its voice, genuinely scaring Luther a little. Unexpectedly, he suddenly smiled again, “Meiye, you don’t know how the world has changed, I am so happy!”

Luther felt a slight breeze behind his back. He could hear a faint sound of moving air heading toward him. He was long prepared for this, as he focused his full attention behind him. He bent forward as he heard the sound of moving wind.

When he bent down and dodged to the side, he saw a long black shadow sweep above his head. The duoluozhong, which didn’t expect to miss, stared at Luther in shock.

Luther smiled coldly as he kicked off the mid-heels on his feet and adopted a fighting stance. Luther stepped onto the hot tar road with “Meiye’s” delicate bare feet. It was so hot that it hurt slightly, but it somehow cleared his mind.

“You managed to dodge that?”

“I think you lived off too many women, so you aren’t as nimble as you think.” Luther laughed. Before he even finished his sentence, the mouthpart lurched forward at him again.

Chapter 31: Sorry, I Lied.

The street had long lost any semblance of its former facade after the ravages of the unforgiving heat. A long black shadow danced between the silhouettes of two combatants engaged in an aggressive fight on that very street. The silhouette with the slightly shorter stature dodged each attack swiftly. Even with twenty successive whip-like attacks from the duoluozhong's long mouthpart, not even one touched the clothes of its opponent.

The duoluozhong was so exhausted that it would be panting heavily right now... if it still had a mouth.

“Who... who... are you? You are not Meiye!” the duoluozhong's enraged buzz rang out in the air. At the same time, he snatched the opportunity and swung its mouthpart toward Luther's face.

As the mouthpart approached, Luther suddenly shrunk in a blink of an eye, and the mouthpart swung over the head of a “little countryside girl”, totally missing its target. Even before the duoluozhong could withdraw backward, the little girl ducked down and slid toward the duoluozhong's legs, and just as he delivered a low sweep kick, he transformed into a tall dangerous-looking man—obviously Hei Zeji. The heavy blow immediately shattered the duoluozhong's ankle. The duoluozhong shriek in pain and collapsed to the ground.

Regardless of whose form he took, Luther did not possess the ability to replicate the ability stats of his reference target but was restricted to the upper limits of their overall stats. If Luther's original strength was 89, and the security man's sister's strength was 14, Luther would only be able to deliver up to a 14 rating. Conversely, when he transformed into Hei Zeji, he could fully utilize the full amount of his strength at 89 since Hei Zeji was many times stronger.

Luther delivered another kick to the duoluozhong's leg. When

the impact of the 89-strength kick landed on the duoluozhong's leg, fragments of shattered bones flew out as they pierced through the skin of its calf. This time, the duoluozhong could no longer stand up. It laid down taking gasps of air as it rested its mouthpart against the ground. Its mouthpart trembled uncontrollably as it touched the scalding hot ground.

Maintaining his Hei Zeji's form, Luther walked to the side of the duoluozhong looking down on it with an icy cold expression.

"Ok, ok... I admit defeat. I lost," the duoluozhong said changing his tone, gasping, "I sprung a surprise attack on you because I thought you were that b*tch, Meiye. It was just a personal grudge! Since you are not her, why do we have to fight?"

"I'm okay with that..." Luther smiled—the amiable smile which could have look endearing on his original face looked twistedly oppressive when it appeared on Hei Zeji's face, "if you let me cut off your mouthpart."

The duoluozhong's slightly pitiful, slightly patronizing expression melted away from his face like ice on a hot plate. Without its mouthpart, it wouldn't be able to feed on any humans, so how was it any different from killing it?

Suddenly, it rolled to its side and forced itself up. Thereafter, lifting its mouthpart...

"This again? No matter how times you try, you won't be able to touch me—" Even before Luther could finish his sentence, the duoluozhong swung its mouthpart downward, not in Luther's direction, but toward its own calf instead.

With a sharp howl, its utterly shattered calf fell off—it actually severed the entire portion of its leg below its knee. "Once I absorb you, I can regenerate as many legs as I want." The duoluozhong gave Luther a deadly stare, looking even more malevolent than before. "Actually, I couldn't decide on using this... but now..."

Luther felt a chill and took two steps back, looking back at it cautiously.

The duoluozhong let out a sneering laugh and took something out with a quick gesture. Luther almost suspected that his eyes were lying to him because—apparently that something was a lunchbox.

“Luckily, I brought this with me.” The duoluozhong laughed in a buzzing manner as it opened the lunchbox.

Much to Luther’s surprise, wobbling pink bubbles slowly floated out from the lunchbox. They quickly covered the combat zone, hovering between the two opponents, dyeing the night sky a faint pink. Luther was distracted for a moment as his gaze followed the direction of the floating pink bubbles unconsciously. When he pulled back his focus and looked toward where the duoluozhong was previously standing, he realized that it had disappeared. Under closer inspection, the duoluozhong was not the only thing that disappeared; the surviving remnants of the shops, the wrecked and dusty signs, the few abandon cars on the streets had all disappeared.

He only saw an endless amount of pink bubbles surrounding him. Through the spaces between the bubbles, he only saw more. They filled the sky, glowing with a beautiful faint light, almost creating an enchanting fantasy-like dreamscape.

[So this is that woman’s ‘trap’?] Luther scoffed, he had already made sense of the situation. He couldn’t help feeling somewhat vexed. Feeling dispirited, he raised his voice and giped, “I have never seen anyone who likes eating soft rice^[1] as much as you! You even bring a lunchbox around with you everywhere to store that soft rice you love so much!”

“Shut up! F*ck! You’ve have gone on long enough about soft rice!”

Luther did not expect the duoluozhong’s verbal retaliation. Its

voice rang from behind the many layers of bubbles. Luther immediately tried his best to listen and search for the source of the sound, but he failed; the bubbles were like small speakers, creating a surround sound environment around him. It was impossible for him to figure out where the sound was from.

“I would advise you not to move rashly. Not all the bubbles here are harmless. Some of them are explosives, and some of them are corrosive. I can’t even tell them apart, but you are welcomed to test them out!”

Luther expression turned grim as he turned to look around him. Each of the bubbles looked exactly the same to him. If he continued maintaining his form, he might expend too much of his energy. Under such circumstances, Luther immediately canceled his transformation and regained his original looks.

“Pfft! So you’re just a kid. Unfortunately, you won’t live for long,” the duoluozhong’s buzzing voice traveled through thousands of bubbles, reverberating through the entire space. Luther ignored it. He continued scanning the space around him and focused his attention on finding the patterns within the movements of the bubbles

Suddenly, he heard a soft “pop”, like the sound of a bubble bursting, coming from behind him. At almost the same time, he noticed a sharp mouthpart rapidly lunging toward him. Since he was already alerted by the sound, he twisted his body and jumped backward, nimbly dodging the mouthpart. However, as he was surrounded by bubbles, one of his elbows unintentionally touched a pink bubble when he was dodging. The bubble burst with a “pop”.

A hissing sound quickly followed, and a white smoke rose from Luther’s elbow. The pain was so intense that he could not utter a word at that moment. He lowered his eyes to observe his wound. His elbow looked as if it had been burned, a large patch of his skin seemed to have dissolved, revealing the layer of blood covered

flesh underneath.

“HA! HA! HA! Didn’t I tell you not to move carelessly? It’s just acid this time, who knows what’s next?” The duoluozhong’s savage laughter filled the air. Cold sweat covered his forehead as Luther endured the pain. He simply could not differentiate the bubble which had just burst from the thousands that surrounded him.

Clearly, the duoluozhong wouldn’t give him time to slowly analyze what was before him, this time, the mouthpart targeted him from another direction. The duoluozhong’s intentions were obvious. The attacks from the duoluozhong’s mouthpart were really not much of a concern to Luther as he could dodge them easily. To counter that, it filled all the possible “dodging space” with these dangerous bubbles, forcing Luther to make a choice between getting stabbed by the mouthpart or receiving damage from the bubbles.

As Luther once again dodged another attack from the duoluozhong’s mouthpart, he accidentally burst a couple of bubbles with his back. This time round, three to four bubbles burst behind him with a “boom”. The draft of air currents from the mini-explosions tore off the shredded fabrics covering his back, exposing a bloody and messy blast injury. Luther was about to bent over when he was suddenly overwhelmed by so much pain from his back that he nearly blacked out. His breathing became heavy as he bit so hard on his lower lip that it started bleeding.

“How unlucky! Those were explosive bubbles!” The duoluozhong gave a gratified laugh. “Did I mention this to you before? Aside from the harmless bubbles, eighteen different types of bubbles will hurt you if you touch them... so why don’t you just let me absorb you? It is such a pity to waste all that fluid in your body so unnecessarily.”

Luther’s fair face was covered with the ashes from the explosion and his own blood. His head drooped slightly, and in somewhat

bashful manner, a smile appeared on his face; his buck teeth looked exceptionally white against his blood-covered lips. His temper rose, and he softly commented, “Are all men who live off women so full of nonsense?”

“Guess you won’t weep until you see your own coffin!”

With a sharp howl, the duoluozhong’s mouthpart attack came again from Luther’s left side. He turned his head to look at the mouthpart which was right in front of him. He shifted his body slightly and turned into a girl who was about over ten. Instead of avoiding the attack, he lunged himself forward, facing the attack head-on.

“Splitch!” The mouthpart pierced into the girl’s shoulder, producing a spray of blood. Before the duoluozhong could laugh celebratorily, Luther bore with the pain and rushed forward, allowing the mouthpart to pierce all the way through his flesh. Despite that, he continued forward as if he felt nothing. Within half a second, Luther found himself with a large gaping wound on his shoulder. At the same time, he had created a path through the bubbles and was now standing right in front of the duoluozhong.

Bubbles had burst around him, but nothing happened.

Before the stupefied duoluozhong could react, Luther canceled his transformation, reached forward with a claw-like gesture and grabbed its throat—based on pure muscular strength, the duoluozhong was still one level below him.

“If I can’t tell which bubbles are dangerous, all I have to do is just stand beside you, right? It’s not that hard to charge toward you following that mouthpart of yours.” Luther spat out a glob of bloody spittle and grinned as he panted. “I know that the building that both of you are camping at is filled to the brim with traps, so I am going to ask you one question.”

The duoluozhong had been strangled so tightly that his face was turning purple and copious amount of fluid was spilling out from

the tip of its mouthpart. Not having the leisure to ponder about how the young man got that information, the duoluozhong tried to shake its mouthpart but only found that it was hopelessly trapped by Luther's shoulder—the movements dug out grisly chunks of flesh. The young man shivered but held his stance.

“How do you go upstairs?”

“I... I'm not stupid. If I tell you, you'll kill me...”

“Wrong. My only goal is to kill that woman. But if you refuse to talk, I will really kill you,” Luther said as his eyes flashed with sincerity, “Your life or that woman's? Choose one.”

To the duoluozhong, it did not even need to think to make such a choice. Once it explained everything, Luther slowly placed the duoluozhong down, but he continued to tighten the grip around its neck. Then, he asked suspiciously, “You're not lying to me, right?”

“No! No! If you don't believe me, you can tie me up and bring me along! You can trust me like this, right?” The duoluozhong's eyes were nearly popping from their sockets from the pressure asserted by Luther. In its desperation, it quickly thought of this idea to survive.

“That seems like a good idea.” Luther nodded his head in a thoughtful manner and suddenly eyed the duoluozhong which startled.

“Sorry, I lied.”

In a split second, the duoluozhong widened his eyes, and the last sound it heard was the frivolous “craaaack” as its throat was crushed.

Translator's note: [1] “eating soft rice” is an insult used to describe men who live off/sponge off women.

Chapter 32: Kill Her or Spare Her?

Ever since he came to this particular world, Luther didn't have the chance to fully appreciate the night sky.

Luther slowly blinked his eyes; he felt as if his body and thoughts were about to amalgamate into a column of smoke and merge into the starfield above him. The silver stars dotted the deep dark blue sky, glowing resplendently like scattered diamonds, twinkling with lights that have existed in the universe billions of years before.

[It's so beautiful...] He exhaled lightly, feeling a little sleepy.

Suddenly, the star-speckled sky was blocked by a large magnified face. Li Zhijun peered down at Luther with his sly fox-like eyes beaming with a playful amusement.

"What are you doing?"

"The night sky is so beautiful... Huh? Brother Jun?" Luther, who had been panting in his pool of blood, regained his clear-headedness and only reacted after a while. He weakly turned his eyes to the side, "Are Marcie and the others here too?"

"I'm here!" he heard Marcie's anxious and furious voice beside him. "Are you an idiot? You are almost going to faint from blood loss! And you're thinking that the night is beautiful!"

Luther only realized then that his entire body felt cold, his mind was murky, and he did not even have an ounce of strength left. He turned to Marcie and smiled weakly, his mind was still occupied by the most important thing, "I waited so long for all of you... why are you only here now? The duoluozhong said that... only it could go upstairs as the traps only recognize it... what shall we do now?"

The others exchanged glances when they heard his question, realizing that dealing with the situation wouldn't be easy.

"Okay, we've got it." Lin Sanjiu patted his hand lightly after she

thought about it for a while. She comforted, “You did well. You just have to focus on recovering now, leave the rest to us.”

After that, Marcie carried a small first-aid box with a red cross sign and sat down beside Luther. When she opened the first-aid box, Luther looked over sideways as if he wanted to say something... Marcie probably got that first-aid box from some small pharmacy. There were only a few sparse items in the box, and each of them seemed to have been manufactured for the sole purpose of cheating consumers, the quality was abysmal.

In contrast, the injuries that Luther had sustained probably required a month of hospitalization. As Marcie looked at the cheapskate bandages which were even thinner than paper, she could not help feeling worried. Li Zhijun suddenly smiled and said, “I remembered that Ah Ji has a type of emergency medicine with quick-acting effects. If you don’t mind, let’s use his medicine?”

“Really? That’ll be great!” Lin Sanjiu barely smiled as Hei Zeji stared at her coldly, without any intention to move. Everything fell silent as if the air around them had frozen over.

Since he didn’t respond, no one dared to prompt him to take the medicine out.

Luther blinked his eyes drowsily, probably because he heard Hei Zeji’s name. He had been drifting in and out of consciousness, so he did not know what they were talking about. He only recalled his battle just now. He gave a feeble smile and said softly in a dazed voice, “I turned into Brother Ji just now and broke that duoluozhong’s leg... Brother Ji’s upper limit... so powerful...”

Due to his serious injuries, his speech was slurred, but everyone there understood what he meant. Three pairs of eyes simultaneously landed on Hei Zeji. After a short while, the latter finally threw out a small bottle with a darkened face. Before Lin Sanjiu could cheer, Hei Zeji suddenly spoke, “Get him to eat this and wait for him to wake up. Don’t bother me anymore.”

No one dared to make a fuss about his attitude, they quickly acknowledged and thanked him. Hei Zeji gave the smiling Li Zhijun a sideways glance and turned to walk away without even saying any farewells. Within a blink of an eye, he disappeared from the street with his katana on his back.

“What do you plan to do next?” Li Zhijun had somehow shifted and was now standing beside Lin Sanjiu. He asked quietly, “From what it seems, without his shapeshifting ability, there is no way both of you can get up there.”

Lin Sanjiu looked over to Marcie. Even though Luther had already eaten the medicine, Marcie still had a lot to do. She had to clean his wound, bandage them and get Luther into a new set of clothes... After she had watched them thoughtfully for a brief moment, she turned and grinned at Li Zhijun, “I think Marcie should stay and look after Luther. I have a plan in mind to deal with that woman.”

“What plan?” Li Zhijun smiled without looking surprised at all.

“I need you to act out something with me,” Lin Sanjiu whispered.

Her idea was actually very simple. Since Lin Sanjiu couldn't go upstairs, she would lure that woman downstairs. With this in mind, she prepared a “script” for Li Zhijun. They walked around the surrounding buildings, making sense of the area before both of them headed toward the taller building where the sniper was hiding in. They each found cover and hid.

Without humans, everywhere became exceptionally quiet. Because it was too quiet, she could constantly hear a fuzzy sound in her ears; she wasn't sure if it was the sound of blood running through the vessels near her eardrum or simply the sound of the wind against her ears. In such an environment, Lin Sanjiu was fairly certain that the sniper on the 15th floor could hear their conversation.

“Brother! Where are you?” the young woman purposely raised

her voice. Her voice rang out immediately, resonating in the silent night. The curtains behind a window on the 15th floor moved momentarily.

“Don’t try to look for me! Just hide well and don’t make a noise, you hear me?” Li Zhijun actually sounded convincingly anxious, “I chopped off one of the duoluozhong’s arm, but I don’t know where he went! Anyway, you just have to hide!”

Their verbal exchange was quick, and their voices echoed through the building, so it was difficult to trace the source of their voice. Just as he said that, as expected, she spotted a person peeking out from above, behind the curtains. Even though the person had cropped hair, it was easy to tell from the figure that the person was a woman. Lin Sanjiu nodded her head secretively and remained quiet, not making any movements.

The two of them did not speak for the next ten minutes. The woman upstairs seemed to have become more and more anxious. She would peek out every few minutes to survey the area. After that woman had done it a couple of times, Lin Sanjiu decided that the time was ripe. Lin Sanjiu let out a sharp scream, instantly compelling the woman to stay by the window side.

“Brother! Come here quick! The duoluozhong is here! I cut off its mouthpart, but it seems to be alive...” contrary to her fearful and helpless tone she tried her best to fake, Lin Sanjiu was actually staring at the window on the 15th floor very calmly.

“Where are you? I’ll go over immediately!”

Lin Sanjiu raised her voice again, afraid that the person upstairs would miss their conversation. “I am at a place called ‘Red Heart Desserts’. Brother, quick! It’s still moving!”

The woman disappeared from the side of the window almost instantaneously. The breeze she created from her movement lifted the curtains, causing Lin Sanjiu’s heart to thump faster for a few seconds. What sort of woman could work with a duoluozhong?

Lin Sanjiu shifted her position, hiding herself a little better. To make their setup even more believable, Li Zhijun and her carried the duoluozhong's corpse with them. They threw it behind the cake display counter so that only the bottom half of its body could be seen. Looking in from outside, one could only see its two legs.

The woman might not be able to use her “sniping” ability at close distances, but things would get dangerous if she started flinging her traps everywhere. This all meant that they had to lower her guard the very moment she stepped into the shop.

Just as they had expected, they could hear the running “thump thump thump” footsteps coming from afar.

[Huh? That sounded a little too loud?] That thought flashed through her mind. She peeked out a little and saw that a woman was indeed running toward them with large strides. Even before that woman came close, Lin Sanjiu could clearly hear her heavy breaths. The cake shop they were in was barely seven to eight minutes away from the apartment... yet the woman was panting so hard.

“Ah, Ah Jun!”

The woman was finally close. Before she even ran through the door, she saw the duoluozhong's corpse. She immediately called out sadly and ran a little more quickly as she rushed in the cake shop. “Ah Jun, are you okay?” she was almost by its side.

Without any warning, a thin card slowly appeared in front of her. Before she could react, the 【black cloth】opened up with a swoosh, wrapping the woman's face. Her ear-piercing shriek was immediately muffled by the black cloth. Just as she was about to reach toward her face and pull the cloth away, she was struck by a heavy item from behind. She fell to the ground.

Lin Sanjiu leaped down from the shelves, stepped on the nape of the woman's neck with one of her feet, and twisted both woman's arms inward. The woman who suddenly found her movement

restricted went ballistic, she flopped on the floor like a fish while she kept screaming: “Let me go! Let me go! Ah Jun! Ah Jun!”

The woman struggled vigorously, and Lin Sanjiu almost lost her grip. In a moment of desperation, a white light flashed in Lin Sanjiu’s hand, and she delivered a heavy blow to the back of the woman’s head with her police baton. The woman instantly stopped.

[Could I have killed her with that blow?] The first thought that came to Lin Sanjiu’s mind was to check for the woman’s breathing. She was relieved when she felt the woman’s warm breaths against her finger.

The feeling she felt when she killed Ren Nan still weighted heavily in her heart, it was a sticky feeling that clung on to her heart. As she recalled it, she could not help feeling a knot in her stomach. Experiencing that once was more than enough for her.

Li Zhijun only came strolling through the door then, with a cheerful smile on his face. “Hey. You managed to deal with her by yourself, that’s impressive!”

Lin Sanjiu wiped the sweat off her forehead and took a deep breath. “Her physical condition was way worse than I expected. Weird.”

LI Zhijun went closer to the woman and flipped her over, revealing the woman’s swallow and emaciated face. She should have already gained the ability to resist high temperatures, but her eyes were sunken, her skin was a waxy yellow, and her lips were chapped. She looked totally dehydrated and malnourished. Even the duoluozhong’s skin was in a better condition than hers. The woman only had average looks originally, now with her current condition, her pitiable state made it difficult to look at her.

Lin Sanjiu gazed at the face, almost lost in her own thoughts.

“What do you plan to do now?” Li Zhijun suddenly edged toward

her, whispering into her ear.

“Huh? What do you mean?” Lin Sanjiu was stunned, “We should have successfully passed the challenge within this pocket dimension, right?”

“No.” Li Zhijun fox-like eyes narrowed in a profound manner, “If your opponent doesn’t die, the pocket dimension will not cease... so you better kill her.”

Chapter 33: Chen Xiaoyuan's Choice

The wind came through the broken window and teased the curtains which were originally a baby blue color.

I like the color baby blue, a lot.

On my 9th birthday, my dad suddenly came home. I found out from our relatives' discussions that he had divorced my mom when I was very young, so that was the first time I actually saw him. The father, who looked so unfamiliar to me, gave me a dress he had brought in from the north. The dress was made of a smooth material, and it was baby blue—a color we rarely see in that backward little hometown. It only took one look for someone like me, who only owned hand-me-downs from my cousin, to be instantly mesmerized by that fantasy-like color.

For the following week, I wore it to school every day until I was forced to change out of it. The sky looked exceptionally blue to me during that time, matching my dress perfectly. The dinner we had during those few days were also very scrumptious. My mom's smile was also exceptionally beautiful when she was with my dad.

Unfortunately, my dad quickly disappeared again. My mom cut up the dress and threw it out. She pulled my hair yelling that I was not allowed to cry because my dad only bought me a present to cheat her out of her money. Just like that, I returned to wearing my cousin's old sportswear.

But those things were none of my business, I still like the color, baby blue.

That was the reason why my mood instantly lifted when I walked into this apartment decorated with baby blue curtains. He looked at me, holding my hand. His eyes were so beautiful when he said, "I knew you would like this, so I chose this apartment."

Regardless of how he had changed, he was still so gentle. The

wish that I did not even dare to think about in the past was actually happening to me now—just the two of us, accompanying each other day and night. It was just like a dream.

If we were unlucky, nobody would pass by for several days. Each time, when he had no choice but to inject his mouthpart into my arm, he would say these words so regretfully and gently to me: “Xiaoyuan, you are really a good woman. I will definitely cherish you...”

He would never sip too much from me. When I started to feel faint, he would immediately stop. Every time he withdrew his mouthpart from my flesh, blood would spray out and stain my baby blue curtains. Once, I secretly washed them with mineral water, not expecting that he would find out. I had never seen him so angry before. After his explosive rage, he hugged me and sobbed, “I can only stay by your side if we have that water...”

His body trembled, and even his mouthpart started buzzing. After that incident, I did not wash those curtains again.

One could call me childish, but I secretly carved an umbrella at the corner of the wall. Under that umbrella, I wrote “Chen Xiaoyuan and Pei Jun”.

When I leaned on the window sill, waiting to snipe any passers-by, I could touch that carving and trace the words with my fingers. Each time I managed to snipe someone down, he would praise me happily and drag the corpse back. As time went by, Ah Jun commented that the fluid from dead people was not fresh, so he told me to target their legs whenever possible. Even though I felt sympathetic, but it was unavoidable.

There was a wall clock in the apartment. Its outer casing had already melted, but the hands on the clock continued steadily. It was hard to believe that so many images ran through my head in such a short amount of time. I leaned over the window sill and shot a bullet toward the sky. Ah Jun had been outside for more than an

hour. In the past, he would never leave for such a long time. Could the situation be as that man described? Was Ah Jun hurt by him?

This was such a critical moment, yet the two of them were not speaking. If one of Ah Jun's arms was really severed, he should rush back up here, right? What should I do?

“Brother! Come here quick! The duoluozhong is here! I cut off its mouthpart, but it seems to be alive...”

Suddenly, the young woman's voice rang out again. Momentarily, the wave of emotion that overwhelmed me was neither the relief knowing Ah Jun's whereabouts, nor my concern over Ah Jun's loss of his mouthpart. It was anger.

Who was she? How dare she talk about my gentle and kind Ah Jun like he was a bug!

However, that anger only lasted for a short while. In the next second, my mind was occupied with a very realistic problem. I had to rush over to save him. If he did not have his mouthpart, I would hoist the girl's dead body up, and her blood will drip into his mouth. Albeit a little unfresh, but I don't think Ah Jun will mind.

I quickly stood up and cleared the traps in the stairways, rushing toward Red Heart Desserts.

Other than my enhanced vision, I did not develop any other passive skills. During the initial stages of my evolution, I already noticed that there was something wrong with Ah Jun. At that point in time, I quietly told myself that it was alright for me even if I sacrificed some passive skills, as long as I could help him. I hope my prayers were heard so God can let us be together.

If that was the case, God will surely still keep us together, right? The Ah Jun that was lying behind the cake display counter will definitely stand up energetically and smile at me saying, “Xiaoyuan, you are really a good woman...” right?

I could not remember how long I was screaming, but after that

blow on the back of my neck, everything in front of me went black.

When I woke up, I found myself tightly bounded, gagged, and blindfolded. I could not see anything, and I could not say a word. I could only hear the sounds around me with my ears. At that moment, the girl who was shouting for her brother was speaking rapidly.

She sounded very furious: “There are many ways to stop her from harming others! But I can’t kill an unarmed and defenseless person! I can’t do it!”

“So, you plan to live in this pocket dimension for your entire life?” her brother dragged his words.

They did not notice that I had already regained consciousness.

The girl was rendered speechless. Even though I could not see, I could feel the stagnant atmosphere. After a while, she quietly said, “I don’t believe that this is the only way! Didn’t you mention that there were other pocket dimensions with other forms of challenges beside such ‘two teams battle’? Since there are all sorts of pocket dimensions in the world... it is possible that there are other ways of ending this. What about Brother Ji? I want to get his opinion on this.”

Even though she did not know what a pocket dimension was, from the way they spoke, she had the inkling that they were not siblings.

The brother said something softly and indistinctly. The girl could not hear him properly, and immediately asked, “What?”

He replied curtly, “Nothing.”

But he was closer to me, so I heard what he said clearly. He said, “You guessed that right quickly.”

Honestly speaking, I wasn’t an intelligent child since young. Right now, they had made me totally confused. It did not matter whether they kill me, there was only one thing that concerned me:

“How is Ah Jun, and where is he?”

The “brother” paced around, seemingly frustrated. I did not dare to move, maintaining my original position, fearing that they might find out that I was awake. He finally sighed and said, “Fine. What you said does make sense. I can’t just ignore your feelings about this. We’ll just leave her here and wait for Ah Ji to return, okay?”

The girl seemed relieved, and there was even a hint of gratitude in her voice, “Thank you. Let’s do that!”

“Let’s go. Marcie and the others must be getting impatient...” the “brother” sounded defeated. The girl replied with an “okay”, and both of their footsteps slowly drifted farther and farther away. The door opened and closed, the room fell silent.

Woah... I actually survived?

“Wait for me, Xiao Jiu. I want to check again to see if that woman is tied up properly.” Suddenly, I heard the “brother” speaking from outside the room. I was shocked and quickly held my breath.

“Alright, make it quick...” the girl said standing at the door.

The man walked through the door, I heard some odd sounds of something being cut up. Next, the footsteps stopped in front of me. Suddenly, someone took off my blindfold. Luckily, I was prepared and continued to close my eyes.

A hand gripped my chin and twisted my face upward, roughly. The grasp was so tight that it hurt. Shortly after, the man said softly, “I know you’re awake... open your eyes and look around.”

I shuddered as I opened my eyes. The multiple pieces of Ah Jun’s dismembered body, his bodily fluids and blood, spread out across the room in front of me, and his decapitated head was placed right in front of me. My favorite feature of his, the Korean celebrity-like long eyes, was now staring vacuously back at me. There was his mouthpart, and there were his arms, but they were all thrown to

the far side of the room...

I heard myself making an incomprehensible “wuu wuu” noise, I think I was crying.

That smiling man with fox-like eyes placed something into my ear and walked out of the door. I only realized at that point that they had carried Ah Jun and myself back to our apartment. Right beside me was the baby blue curtains that I loved so much.

“Is she still unconscious?” a girl’s voice came faintly from outside the door.

“Yes, she is still unconscious,” the man replied.

I was too occupied to consider what that man was planning because the scene of the terrible state that Ah Jun was in was the only thing that filled my eyes.

I did not expect to hear the man’s voice in my ears at that point in time.

“That person is called Pei Jun, right? He had abandoned you, he went ahead and died first. But his death wasn’t painful. He was able to leave this horrible world and a woman that he did not love. I guess it can be considered somewhat of a relief.

“He doesn’t love you. But because you could help him hunt, he had to be bounded by you. That must be too miserable—I guess dying was his liberation.

“You are so pitiful. Abandoned by your dad when you were young and having nobody who loves you. Even your mother often call you a burden. After all, if you did not exist, your mother would have remarried long ago... you’re such a waste of space.”

His voice seemed to hold a mysterious power, and it merged with the scene of Ah Jun’s dead body creating a hallucination of psychedelic abstract art. I cried so hard that I could not hear what he continuously said, much less considered why he knew so much. The only sentence that struck me was one that seemed to have a

life of its own: “I loosened the ropes just now. Why don’t you look into the drawer beside the window?”

After I had freed myself, I went to open the drawer. “You have no lover, and no one loves you. How should you continue living all by yourself?” this sentence continued echoing through my mind.

I saw the familiar metal bullet floating within the drawer.

“I’m sorry,” I don’t know who I was saying this to... perhaps to myself. This world is too scary for me, I can’t take it any longer. “Bang!” With the sound of a gunshot, the last thing that I saw was the curtains covered by my blood. They were no longer their original baby blue.

“Oh gosh...”

Li Zhijun, who had just walked down the building, paused. His eyes brimmed with tears as he said to Lin Sanjiu, “I think that sound came from the 15th floor.”

Chapter 34: Scorched Earth Oasis

The pocket dimension finally ended. Lin Sanjiu gave a sigh laden with her complex emotions.

Because they had restarted three times in the pocket dimension, it felt like quite some time had passed. However, the rays of the eastern sun on the horizon lit up their surrounding only after they had driven for an hour. Since they woke up at 10 pm at night and the sun usually rises around 5 - 6 am, it meant that Lin Sanjiu's group had only spent about six hours in the pocket dimension.

In the end, she still could not understand why that woman would commit suicide... Lin Sanjiu was perplexed by this.

After they had heard the gunshot, she went back to Chen Xiaoyun's apartment with Li Zhijun and was shocked by the gory scene. Even though she had a vague hunch that Li Zhijun had something to do with it, it was undeniable that they only heard that lethal gunshot after they both reached downstairs. Likewise, it was a fact that the woman killed herself using her own ability.

Li Zhijun acted very naturally, even with Lin Sanjiu looking, he took out a tiny light bulb and held it above the corpse. Suddenly, as if the corpse reacted, it emitted yellow lights at intervals which were all absorbed into the tiny light bulb. Lin Sanjiu had her suspicions and tried to pry a couple of times, but he skilfully avoided her questions.

[Anyway, what has happened has happened. It's best not to know too much about dangerous people. The most important thing is to deal with the present...] With that, she managed to stop thinking about the matter.

The truck slowed down. With Lin Sanjiu leading the way, they drove their fleet of vehicles into the factory district. The area they were in was a new industrial park which had been well planned. Ash gray five-story buildings were neatly arranged in rows within

their allocated plot. Despite over a month of erosion caused by the elevated temperatures, the factory buildings appeared way more durable than the building in the city.

As Lin Sanjiu looked absent-mindedly at the sign at the entrance of the factory district, she recalled what Li Zhijun said before he left last night.

"We are leaving now. After all, Tian Minbo is still somewhere out there..." Li Zhijun flashed a pleasant grin showing his white teeth, "Take care."

"Didn't you say that you wanted us to do something in return?" Lin Sanjiu kept that in mind.

"Well, I haven't decided. Let's take it that you all owe me a favor..." Li Zhijun said softly, "Just don't forget about it."

"We won't, of course! Brother Jun, Brother Ji, we got out of this jam thanks to the both of you. If you need help, just let me know!" Luther leaped forward, thanking them both sincerely. Marcie stood beside him nodding gratefully.

Lin Sanjiu was the only one who sighed inwardly. Owing someone a favor is one thing, but for that someone to be Li Zhijun... However, something puzzled her: After 14 months, they will be randomly transported into any of the thousands of existing parallel universes. If they don't even meet again in their lifetimes, wouldn't Li Zhijun's intentions be in vain?

Almost as if he had read her mind, Li Zhijun narrowed his eyes and said unexpectedly, "Right, there is another thing I want to tell all of you. Do you know that there is something called a visa? If you find a consular officer, you can get a visa each and head to the next world together. This way, you won't get separated."

Luther immediately sought for advice, "That's our plan, Brother Jun, do you have any clues to go about that?"

"I don't have anything concrete, all I can say is that your best

chances are where people gather," Li Zhijun replied as his gaze rippled across Lin Sanjiu. He continued, smiling, "It is really odd, but once a person gets a visa for the first time, they will be registered under the shared database of all consular officers; it works like a network operating system. If you amass enough items to make an exchange, you could even find another person through a consular officer."

[Fine. So, this is a debt we must repay...] Lin Sanjiu thought to herself before she suddenly asked, "Who manages these consular officers anyway? Is it possible that organizations still exist within these apocalyptic worlds?"

"No. 'Consular Officer' is a type of evolved ability. Usually, a person will not gain other new abilities after they had developed the 'consular officer' ability. However, a consular officer cannot issue a visa to themselves, so they have to get other consular officers to issue one. You can say that this ability only benefits others and not the user. Therefore, generally speaking, people who possess this ability will use their issued visas to exchange for necessary supplies and safety."

The three greenhorns listened in awe.

"Okay, good luck to all of you! Try to look in crowded places!" Li Zhijun turned and walked away as he said this, waving one arm in the hand as a farewell gesture. Before Hei Zeji took a step forward, he suddenly stopped and looked at the three of them. His ramrod-stiff posture seemed to mellow a little, "You're all so weak. No one will come to your rescue next time."

After he said that coldly, he caught up with his companion. With a few leaps and bounds, they both disappeared into blocks of buildings. With an array of complicated emotions, the three of them who remained, made preparations to continue on their journey.

With that said, finding a consular officer was the most pressing

issue right now. As they walked past another factory, Lin Sanjiu ruminated over what Li Zhijun said. [Crowded places? In this hyperthermic hell, most humans are already dead. How can there still be crowded places?]

Just a second after this thought surfaced in her mind, Lin Sanjiu was startled by the sudden sound of music. A lively, upbeat dance music quickly filled the rundown street in front of them. It was as if God had overheard her thoughts.

Shortly after, someone shouted out happily, over the loud music, "New people have arrived!"

A cacophony of noise suddenly erupted from the factory building in front of them. The door belonging to a factory called "Reunion Food Processing Plant" was pulled open, and a group of people rushed out onto the road, clattering. Lin Sanjiu was shocked and quickly stepped on her brakes. At the same time, she heard Luther's confused voice over the walkie-talkie, "What going on?"

"I have no idea... Let's see what they're up to!" she replied hurriedly.

Unlike Lin Sanjiu and the others who were clad in filthy clothes covered with dirt, sweat, and blood, the group of men and women that came out, blocking the road in front of them, wore fresh and clean clothes. They waved incessantly at them, as if welcoming the return of their families. Each of them seemed to be genuinely happy. Within the crowd, there was even a girl who jumped and waved continuously, even though she was wearing high heels.

Lin Sanjiu hesitated and did not dare to get down from her vehicle. She didn't mind being called a coward, but the first thought that came to her mind when she saw so many people was that they were all posthumans. The elevated temperatures within Hyperthermal Hell had already reached an unknown level. Anyone who could survive and maintain the normalcy of their appearance and mannerism must undoubtedly be a posthuman. From her

rough estimate, there were at least twenty people in the group. After all, their vehicles were filled with supplies, if these people harbored any ill intent...

Lin Sanjiu cautiously winded her window halfway down and shouted out, "Who are you guys? Why are you blocking the way?"

The group of people started discussing softly among themselves. Finally, a middle-aged woman was elected out of the group by popularity. She appeared slightly embarrassed and even said to the group, "You are all putting me on the spot." Thereafter, she smiled and approached Lin Sanjiu's truck.

Lin Sanjiu quickly sized her up. The woman was about forty-years-old, had a medium built, and her hair was tied up in a bun. She had an honest and kind countenance. The thing that bothered Lin Sanjiu the most was the fact that the woman was wearing clean, elegant, and well-coordinated clothes, and a pair of mid-heels. Her outfit was seemingly fitting, even for a time before the insane heat descended upon their world.

Not only this woman but also the group of people behind her, all appeared relaxed as if their lives had been comfortable and peaceful. In contrast, a drop of Chen Xiaoyuan's blood was still on Lin Sanjiu's face. She tried to casually wipe it away, but instead, it was smeared into a line. Her originally beautiful long hair was now tied up in a messy ponytail; when she looked at her reflection in the rearview mirror, she saw that her brows were tightly knitted, her guard was up, and her face was covered with dirt.

"Hi, young lady. This place is called 'Oasis'. My surname is Li, you can call me Sister Li," the middle-aged woman sounded very enthusiastic. She was like... the type of representative that the management will choose to speak in general meetings. "You don't have to be worried or afraid anymore. Once you are here in Oasis, your suffering and difficulties will end!"

She ended her sentence with a zealous fervor, and the group

behind her cheered.

Lin Sanjiu did not say a word—honestly speaking, she did not know what to say in such a situation either. She looked at Sister Li quietly and waited for her to continue.

"Young lady, what's your name? Why don't you come down? You can have a proper meal and take a bath... You poor child. You must not have rested well these few days." Sister Li looked at Lin Sanjiu sympathetically.

Lin Sanjiu did not move, she only asked, "What kind of place is this Oasis?"

She heard a few crackling static sound from the walkie-talkie beside her. Apparently, Marcie and Luther were listening in without a word.

Sister Li smiled confidently as if she had anticipated her doubts. "You must know what has happened outside. Many people have died... Not only humans, even trees! There isn't even any water out there! But under the protection of Oasis, our living conditions are just as before. We don't ever have to be worried or fearful because our camp is able to support a population of more than ten thousand people. Everyone here has enough to eat and drink. If we fall sick, we can also see the doctor..."

Her face beamed when she talked about Oasis, "There is already a population of 1800 people in Oasis. We swore to save every single human being in this world!"

Chapter 35: Is This Really a Utopia?

Lin Sanjiu watched Sister Li and Luther walking through the large doors of the factory as she remained in her truck. The door of her truck was locked, and she had winded up the windows. A few men and women were chatting beside her truck and seemed to be at ease as if they did not have to struggle to survive every day. They even reminded her of how things were before the apocalypse. Many of them even nodded and smiled at her when she gazed at them.

A young mother pushing a stroller walked past her truck. The chubby one-year-old in the stroller even pointed at Lin Sanjiu making incomprehensible babbles.

Even though she prudently got Luther to investigate the actual situation of the place, she found her shoulders relaxing when she saw the sight of the child.

“Is it okay that he followed Sister Li all by himself?” Marcie asked somewhat worriedly over the walkie-talkie. Out of the three of them, Luther was the most suitable person. If something really happened, he could quickly return if he created a distraction with his shapeshifting ability. But before Lin Sanjiu could respond, Luther already answered Marcie, laughing into his walkie-talkie, “Don’t worry. The people are okay.”

Sister Li spoke indistinctly beside him.

Lin Sanjiu gave a sigh of relief, even though she was mainly worried about the supplies in their vehicles. She believed that people could pursue many lofty ideals, but to provide shelter for any random stragglers without seeking reciprocation... how could this be possible? Even without considering their hidden agendas, did “Oasis” even have the resources to do so?

No matter how she thought about it, she felt that they would demand everyone to hand over their possessions before

distributing the shared resources evenly. This was only logical. If she oversaw Oasis, she would also do so.

“Xiao Jiu, Marcie. Their compound is huge... I think they even linked up this area to the factory district beside the mountain. Oh... what’s this? Why are they queuing up?” Luther voice suddenly sounded quite surprised.

“This is our canteen,” Sister Li leaned towards the walkie-talkie as if she hoped that the other two people could also hear her. “Every day at 6am in the morning and 9 pm at night, we will share a meal in the canteen. It is almost time now. These are the people who haven’t had their breakfast.”

Before Lin Sanjiu could react, a flurry of noise came from Luther’s side, and he commented in amazement, “Xiao Jiu, their breakfast consists of millet congee, roasted corn, and a plate of preserved vegetable. The servings are pretty large...”

“You should see our dinner. We make sure that everyone has a serving of vegetable, meat, and rice!”

“How is this possible? With such high temperatures, how can you obtain the vegetables and meat we had in the past? Furthermore, how much water must you use to cook so much rice!?” Luther questioned, finding it difficult to believe what she had said. His words also reflected the thoughts of both Lin Sanjiu’s and Marcie’s.

“Didn’t you see our roasted corn? Don’t worry. We can eat as much vegetables and meat as we want. And you don’t have to worry about water. Since all of you haven’t officially joined us, according to our rules, I can’t tell you too much. Once you become a member of Oasis, you will naturally find out.”

After that shock, Lin Sanjiu’s curiosity was piqued but she did believe that Sister Li was telling the truth.

She could tell by observing the people outside her vehicle. Each

of them was full of energy, had moist-looking skin, and their lips and nails were a healthy pink... Even though Lin Sanjiu and her group had enough food and water, they only ate processed food which did not have much nutritional value. Their meals only served to satisfy their hunger and provide them with the calories they needed. Compared to the people in Oasis, they did look emaciated.

Just as she gazed blankly at the Oasis members, Luther spoke over the walkie-talkie, the signal was intermittent, “Sister Li... this is my walkie-talkie’s maximum functional distance. I have to discuss... first.”

From what he had said, he should be coming back soon. Lin Sanjiu watched the entrance of the factory, and sure enough, Luther ran out happily after a while. Sister Li and an unknown man followed behind him. The small group of people approached their fleet of vehicles. Luther knocked on her truck door, and Lin Sanjiu winded down her window.

“It is simply unbelievable!” Luther’s buckteeth shined brightly under the morning sun. “It’s awesome! There is a photovoltaic system here, so they even have electricity! They covered the top floors with reflective sheets, and they even built a large heat insulated shaded greenhouse, it instantly cools you down when you walk inside!”

Lin Sanjiu nodded her head looking at the two people behind him.

“Let me make some introductions.” Sister Li pointed to the muscular man with an average height. “This is our leader. When he heard that new people had arrived, he was very concerned, so he came over to assess the situation.”

[...Leader?]

“Hi, I am Chen Jinfeng. I am one of the top-level executives in Oasis’s Council of Eight.” The man who had been identified as

their leader smiled, somewhat boastfully, then he continued, “It is great that we can meet our fellow survivors.”

“Nice to meet you...” once again, Lin Sanjiu did not know what to say. The whole atmosphere in Oasis was too different from the environment she had gotten used to over the past one month, so she felt strangely out of place. “Wait, I’ll just get Marcie to come over. We can talk more after I get off my truck.”

When Marcie heard her, she alighted from the bus and locked it before jogging over. Her bed of fluffy red hair looked exceptionally dazzling under the sun, and Chen Jinfeng was stunned when he saw her. He smiled and said, “Oh, I didn’t expect to see a friend from overseas! Of course, the ways of the world today, everyone is a compatriot!” After that, he extended his hand and shook Marcie’s hand. Lin Sanjiu also got down from her truck and stood beside Marcie.

“Alright, I will give you a brief introduction.” Lin Jinfeng gestured confidently, “The reason why Oasis could save the lives of these 1800 people is all thanks to Professor Bai who detected that something was wrong. Do you still remember the heat wave that lasted over a hundred days? Professor Bai had been researching about crop growth for a long time and now gained tremendous success in his research. Currently, the growth cycle of the crops we have here at Oasis have been shortened to 30 days using his technology, and they are even heat-resistant!”

Noticing the shocked faces the three of them have, Sister Li added, “Luther have seen the roasted corn on today’s menu, that is one of the crops that we have here.”

“But... how is this possible? Besides, daytime temperatures can even melt plastic!” Marcie covered her mouth as she gasped in amazement. No matter how they put it, it all sound too incredulous.

“We built a temperature controlled greenhouse specifically for

growing crops.” Chen Jinfeng laughed. When he saw their expressions, he said tactfully, “Since you have been out there roaming, it is normal that you might not be able to suddenly understand how effective a collective community is. What Luther saw was just the tip of the iceberg, here at Oasis, we can do so much more!”

As he continued, he became emotional, “I know that the whole human race is in a terrible situation right now. But just look at our history. From the great flood, the bubonic plague, the Spanish flu... they were all disasters that nearly wiped mankind, but we still survived! It is the same this time! Even in our predicament, we will find hope and a way out! We will save our fellow humans... What we do here is all for the next generation. Thousands of years later, our descendants will all exclaim that Oasis is the spark of mankind!”

His eyes shone brightly as he spoke with passion. His skin flushed slightly due to his excitement. They could all see that Chen Jinfeng truly believed in Oasis and the future of mankind. Compared to his righteous, uplifting message, Lin Sanjiu felt rather ashamed about what she was going to say. “Well... I want to ask you something... If we join you, what do you plan to do with... our possessions?” Sister Bai immediately eyed her.

Chen Jinfeng laughed. “It is a good thing that young people like you have your apprehensions, it means that you thought through this carefully. You don’t have to worry about that. We have enough resources in Oasis to sustain our population. We will not forcefully take anybody’s possessions. You can keep what you have, contribute to the community, or use it to trade with others... In short, what’s yours is still yours.”

When he said that, Lin Sanjiu was really surprised. With a population of 1800, there must be people with their own belongings and supplies. However, everything seemed so peaceful as if they never had any disputes.

Marcie asked Chen Jinfeng another question which he also patiently answered. Another heartening thing to know was that the Oasis's members only have some compulsory daily duties to fulfill. They could use the rest of their time however they liked and had quite a lot of freedom.

When they were on this topic, Sister Li gave an embarrassed smile, "Those group of young people enjoys waiting for passersby at the road... They blasted that loud music because they wanted to welcome all of you and because they just want to have fun. There are no disgusting creatures nearby because we have eradicated them from this area."

Luther and Marcie exchanged glances, then they both looked at Lin Sanjiu.

"Xiao Jiu, what do you think about this? Should we join Oasis?" Marcie whispered, "Both of us don't really mind."

Lin Sanjiu bit her lip and did not reply as she inwardly grouched over the fact that she could not activate her Keen Sense at this very moment. While she ruminated over it, she remembered the words that Li Zhijun left them, "Go to a crowded place to find for a consular officer."

[Is the population of 1800 large enough?]

"Can we quit? If we want to stop being an Oasis member?" she decided to go all out, playing the role of the bad guy and asking all the offensive questions.

As expected, Sister Li pursed her lips. Chen Jinfeng who appeared more open-minded laughed and replied, "That would be rather foolish, but we respect each other's freedom here in Oasis. You can leave whenever you want."

"Since you put it that way..." Lin Sanjiu looked at both her companions hesitantly, "we will join temporarily."

Chapter 36: The Missing Walkie-Talkie

The word “temporarily” in Lin Sanjiu sentence did little to dampen Chen Jinfeng’s enthusiasm. He gave a loud clap and spoke zealously, “That’s the way! Everyone in Oasis will become part of human history in the future and will be remembered throughout the ages.”

Watching them, the members who have been loitering outside the entrance of the factory realized that they have decided to join; they all cheered and rushed toward Lin Sanjiu and the others. They all started clapping. Not even one of them did this half-heartedly; all of them clapped very enthusiastically and quickly attracted even more people with more applauses.

“Welcome! New members!”

Lin Sanjiu felt a little at a loss facing such a hearty crowd. She turned to look at Luther and Marcie, only to find that both her fair-skinned companions were blushing to the tip of their ears. When Luther spotted her gaze, he sheepishly whispered, “They’re so enthusiastic... I have never received such a warm welcome.”

Lin Sanjiu held back her laughter, having the same sentiments.

Chen Jinfeng only managed to get the crowd to stop after he had gestured a few times for the crowd to calm down.

“Dear comrades, the most important thing for our new members right now is that they familiarize themselves with this new environment. The sun is out now, so everyone, please go back to your beds and sleep. We can celebrate their arrival later, at night!”

His words stirred up another round of applauses.

“Xiao Yu, please inform the canteen staff that we have three new members today. Tell them not to forget to prepare their share!” Sister Li requested with a bright smile, and a girl with a ponytail quickly ran back into the factory. The rest of the people also left

after some persuasion from Chen Jinfeng, smiling at Lin Sanjiu and the others.

Apparently, the people here in Oasis also discovered that it was risky to do anything when the sun was out, and the best course of action was to hide and sleep during the day.

Following which, Sister Li said to them, “The dormitories are too warm during the day, so we have partitioned two levels of the basement and brought the beds downstairs... Follow me now, I will show you to your beds.”

“So where should we park our vehicles?” Unquestionably, this was asked by Lin Sanjiu who had already made her mind up not to be afraid of being offensive.

“Drive it into our compound, there is an empty space suitable for parking,” Sister Li answered warmly, she did not seem displeased this time.

The three of them agreed. They drove into the compound and parked their vehicles in a corner. Lin Sanjiu only realized how huge the compound was when she was inside. The boundary walls between four or five factories have been demolished, creating a vast open area. There was a total of over ten buildings in Oasis. Each of these buildings had two-floored basements and were converted into sleeping quarters for the members. Reflective sheets covered the top of each of these buildings, and under the dangerous sun, white light was reflected everywhere. So, as they walked around, they could hardly open their eyes.

Through squinted eyes, Sister Li looked at all of them and said in a rather embarrassed manner, “We are reaching soon. Can you see that building with the ‘42’ sign? The other buildings are fully occupied, that’s the only building with available space.”

“If there is no one living upstairs, what is the purpose of those reflective sheets?” Lin Sanjiu asked out of curiosity.

“Professor Bai is doing an experiment on heat-insulation. He hopes to lower the interior temperature to within 50°C. If the temperature can be lowered, we will be able to live upstairs and even cultivate crops there with aeroponics...” while she explained this, she suddenly exclaimed, “In the past, 50°C would sound so intimidating! Thanks to the medicine that Professor Bai developed, everyone can resist the heat much better.”

“What?” The three of them turned to look at Sister Li what they heard this.

[Medicine? What is she talking about?]

Lin Sanjiu hesitated for a moment, but when she wanted to ask another question, they were already in front of Building 42, and the girl called Xiao Yu, who had a low ponytail, was now standing at the entrance. She smiled and waved at them enthusiastically, “Sister Li! I’ve made the arrangements for their beds. We took some pillows and bed sheet from the warehouse. Why don’t you come look, Sister Li?”

“It’s not necessary. I trust you,” Sister Li replied and turned to the three of them, “You can follow Xiao Yu. She is in-charge of the accommodation matters in this building. Go ahead first, I have something to discuss with Xiao Yu.” The three of them nodded, smiling. It felt like they were entering a boarding school—they pushed out the door and entered the hallway.

When they entered the building, they sensed that the surrounding temperature was much lower. Their pores, which were tortured by the extreme heat, could finally start breathing again. Even though they could tell that it was not 50°C, it was close. Compared to the murderous heat outside, this Professor Bai’s heat-insulation experiment had produced quite an astounding result even at this point.

Lin Sanjiu was the last to enter. She had just fully stepped in when Xiao Yu opened the door. Seeing their rather astonished

reaction, Xiao Yu quickly smiled and gestured for them to wait inside. Lin Sanjiu nodded and turned to walk away but stopped after she had thought of something. A white light flashed over the hands she hid behind her, and a walkie-talkie appeared. It was the one left behind by Voley.

She did not know why, but she was curious to hear what Oasis' members would say in private when there were no outsiders with them. When Xiao Yu turned to walk away, she stealthily placed the walkie-talkie at the gap of the door before walking hastily into the main hall on the first floor. There weren't any people around in the main hall, most likely because everyone went to sleep, so only Luther and Marcie noticed what she did.

Since they have been through a few life and death situations with her, they both didn't say a word even though they were a little appalled. They quickly adjusted their expression to look natural while Lin Sanjiu took the walkie-talkie that hung on Marcie's waist and switched it on secretly.

Amidst the crackling sounds, they heard Sister Li's voice.

"Even though Executive Chen appeared... I was the first one who spotted them... I even brought them around..." a walkie-talkie was not a tapping device after all; furthermore, the sound came from behind a door so the sound quality was really bad. Just when the three of them were about to plastered their ears to the speaker, they heard a clear sentence: "These three people should be counted as mine, no matter what, right?"

The three of them were stunned. They looked at each other and gathered around the walkie-talkie again.

Xiao Yu seemed to be avoiding a straight answer as she said, "Normally, it should be counted as yours... but since Executive Chen stepped in... why don't you ask..."

"Look for him...he is an executive..." Sister Li complained but quickly laughed and said cautiously to Xiao Yu, "Don't say

anything to the others. You know that I...”

Xiao Yu seemed to nod in agreement.

“Quick! Keep it!” Luther, who had been keeping a lookout for them, urged. “Their conversation is ending.”

Lin Sanjiu quickly switched off the walkie-talkie, and Marcie hung it at her waist again. The three of them quickly stood apart from each other. At the same time, Xiao Yu already bade farewell to Sister Li and opened the door. Lin Sanjiu looked cautiously in the direction of the location where she had hidden the walkie-talkie. Unfortunately, it was too late to retrieve it because Xiao Yu had already greeted them, “All of you, come with me. You can look around your living quarters. We spent a lot of time trying to make it comfortable!”

She had no choice but to find another opportunity to retrieve it. Lin Sanjiu dragged her feet so that she was at the back of the group. With a flash of white light, a card flew above the walkie-talkie, and a black cloth covered it.

Luckily, Xiao Yu was totally unaware. She was a round-faced girl who was not very tall, and the first impression she gave was that she was a friendly and direct person. But after conversing with her, one could sense an obsequiousness about her that came from her stepping into society too early. However, it was hidden behind her smile and was not irksome. Xiao Yu led them to basement one and smiled a little apologetically, “The lower level is cooler, so it had been fully occupied. You’ll have to compromise and sleep here.”

After that, she opened the metal door in front of them. They could no longer recognize what the basement was used for in the past. The vast area that basement one covered was filled with small little cubicles partitioned by white building planks. There was a rectangular opening for each cubicle and curtains with all sort of designs were hung as replacements for doors.

The rooms segmented the space into a few large divisions, and

the corridors were all very narrow. Even though there were fluorescent lights in the basement, the electricity was turned off, so the cramped corridors were extremely dark. The soft snoring sounds from some of the rooms and the presence of other humans created an oddly sleep-inducing atmosphere.

“Come. Miss Lin, you can stay here.” She opened a door and walked about seven to eight minutes. Xiao Yu finally stopped at a cubicle and pulled open the curtain. Lin Sanjiu looked up and saw her cubicle number: 1629. She looked inside. The metal bedframe was not big, and there was only a thin mattress. There were a flat pillow and a bed sheet that probably acted as a blanket. If this was before the apocalypse, it could have been considered a slum, but to Lin Sanjiu, it was really not bad since she had slept on the floor for almost a month.

Luther’s and Marcie’s cubicles were very far from hers. One of them was staying in 1734, and the other was in 1736. They were about one hundred over cubicles between them. Xiao Yu had explained that this was due to the increasing population in Oasis, so rooms were running out. “Once Professor Bai’s heat insulation experiment is successful, we will be able to move upstairs. I will arrange for the three of you to be together then,” she said smiling.

“You can go ahead, I will just make myself comfortable here,” Lin Sanjiu said to Xiao Yu quickly—she wanted to retrieve that walkie-talkie as soon as possible, and this was a good opportunity.

Xiao Yu agreed and gave her some advice before walking away with Luther and Marcie. They had barely left when Lin Sanjiu immediately rushed back to the main hall on the first floor. She pushed open the door and looked around. Just as before, there was nobody around. She rushed to the door at the entrance. Unexpectedly, she found no trace of the walkie-talkie.

She was shocked. “Huh?” she could not help exclaiming softly as she scanned the area around her. Just then, she felt a tap on her shoulder.

“What are you looking for?”

Chapter 37: I'm Just Taking a Walk

This was no small matter—shocked, Lin Sanjiu quickly turned to look behind her.

A bespectacled stranger was standing behind her. He looked like an intellectual, but he had a habitual frown which gave him a stern look, “Did you lose something?”

[It should be okay if I give him a generic reply.] Lin Sanjiu composed herself and gave an apologetic smile. “Yes, I dropped something accidentally, but I can’t find it now...”

Her words sounded normal, but the bespectacled man frowned deeper. Suddenly, he drew his face close to her with a solemn expression. Lin Sanjiu could not tell what was wrong with the man, so she took two steps back quickly and looked back at him uneasily.

Unexpectedly, the man snorted and said, “You’re not being totally honest—I’ve never met a woman that doesn’t lie.”

[Huh?] Lin Sanjiu’s eyes widened.

“But it doesn’t matter. The item does belong to you, you weren’t lying about that...” regardless of what the man said, he kept his solemn expression. “Fine. Since you are the owner, I’ll tell you this. A short man took away that item a few minutes ago.”

[Short man...] She had just arrived at Oasis and basically knew no one here. But if Sister Li and Xiao Yu didn’t discover it, even if some random person took it away, she could just treat as if she’d lost the item! Anyway, Voley gave them more than one set of walkie-talkies from his car.

However, Lin Sanjiu’s focus was no longer on that walkie-talkie. Instead, she scrutinized the bespectacled man from head to toe to the extent that the other party felt uncomfortable. Then, she smiled and offered a handshake, “Hi, I am Lin Sanjiu. Thanks for

your information. What's your name?"

From behind his glasses, the man looked at the hand that she extended and showed no attempt to reciprocate, "My name is Hu Changzai. If a young lady like you suddenly shows affection, you must have an ulterior motive."

Even though Lin Sanjiu thought of herself as a reasonable person, her smile froze.

[It's just a handshake. This guy should thank the existence of the New World! If human civilization didn't collapse, he would have difficulties integrating into society!]

Lin Sanjiu criticized silently as she suppressed her anger and drew back her hand. Hu Changzai did not feel that he said anything wrong. "I'm leaving," he said with a long face, turning to leave.

"That's your ability, right?"

Hu Changzai paused when he heard that question.

"You can tell if someone is lying?" Lin Sanjiu walked slowly to his side, she couldn't help feeling unsatisfied if she didn't say these words: "It's quite impressive and rather useful. But if you expose a lie in such an obvious manner, wouldn't that defeat its purpose?"

Surprisingly, Hu Changzai appeared startled by her words—his spectacles even glided down his nose. He quickly readjusted it and stared at Lin Sanjiu, asking, "Why do you know about these abilities?"

Lin Sanjiu was a little stunned, "Days have passed since the apocalypse... this is just common knowledge, right?"

"Oh, I've got it. You must be from the outside world." Hu Changzai took off his spectacles and wiped it with the corner of his shirt as this dawned on him. He wore his spectacles again and took a good look at Lin Sanjiu. "How long have you been here? How long were you out there? From what you said, I presume that you

have abilities too?”

[Why should I be interrogated by you?] Lin Sanjiu found it ludicrous, so she countered with her own questions, “Isn’t everyone from Oasis from the outside world? Do you mean that some people here haven’t developed abilities?”

Just when she asked these questions, she remembered that Sister Li mentioned something about a medicine. [What is the connection between that medicine and people’s abilities?]

Hu Changzai eyed her sternly, “I asked the questions first. Question and response. Don’t you understand?”

Lin Sanjiu found it infuriating to hold a conversation with this person, so she frowned and decided to leave. Even though she knew that there was something strange going on with the people here in Oasis and their abilities, it was not necessary for her to get the answers from him. Out of the 1800 people here, she could easily ask anyone else!

She didn’t anticipate hearing Hu Changzai’s footsteps behind her as she left. He chased her and shouted, “Why are you so hot tempered? Hey, slow down. I still have unanswered questions... Slow down, please. Alright, alright! I will answer your questions. Please stop!”

Lin Sanjiu finally stopped. Despite her above-average physical capabilities, she didn’t even reach 10% of her speed, yet Hu Changzai could not really catch up with her. Her brows knitted as she asked, “You haven’t experienced any physical enhancement?”

Behind Hu Changzai’s gold-rimmed spectacles, his blank expression answered her question.

“What’s going on? All posthumans should experience some form of physical enhancement.” Lin Sanjiu was puzzled.

“What?” Hu Changzai looked bewildered as he panted heavily. “Let me ask you a question first. You must answer me. When did

you arrive at Oasis?”

“Just about 30 minutes ago,” Lin Sanjiu thought for a moment and replied. Afraid that he would ask would ask too much, she quickly shot back with a question, “Didn’t the people here develop any abilities?”

Hu Changzai shook his head with a serious expression on his face, “Most of the people in Oasis are just normal people. Logically speaking, they might not have even survived the early stages when temperatures were rising and would have died like the others outside... However, Professor Bai developed a type of medicine which could artificially induce the necessary Heat Resistance Adaptation even in normal humans. But that was as far as it went, and since normal people have zero Potential Growth Value, they don’t gain any new abilities even if they consume more medicine. This is not a secret. If you stay a little longer, you’ll naturally come to know about it.”

[This Professor Bai... must be a super genius!]

Lin Sanjiu was very impressed and quickly asked another question, “What about you?”

“I joined Oasis on the 7th day of the New World.” Hu Changzai gave an uncharacteristic sigh despite his stoic face. “At that time, I had already developed my ‘Lie Detection’ ability, but I didn’t experience any sort of physical enhancement. All these time, I rarely met another posthuman like me, so when you made a remark about my ability, I was really a little excited.”

Lin Sanjiu nodded to his explanation. Suddenly, she realized something and asked urgently, “Wait. If you already developed your ability then... what did they say about that? Do they know about your ability?”

“I don’t think so, not at that point in time.” Hu Changzai pondered about the underlying meaning of her question since she seemed rather anxious. “Oasis provides the same narrative to every

new member. This place protects the spark of humanity; it has a great, noble cause. So, what do you mean by that?”

Lin Sanjiu remained silent, she didn't know why she acted that way either.

“You are making things too complex... I used my ‘Sift Falsehoods from Truth’ ability, and they're telling the truth. I've been here so long and discovered that the people here in Oasis really do not have any hidden agenda. They honestly want to save the humanity.”

[No hidden agenda?] Lin Sanjiu remembered Sister Li's words: “These three people should be counted as mine...”

[If they were so selfless and dedicated, why do they sound like multi-level marketing salesmen?]

“But...” Hu Changzai suddenly started to stammer a little, “I've got an advice for you—”

“Why aren't you asleep! What are you doing?”

A furious voice rang out in the main hall, questioning impolitely. Lin Sanjiu turned to look behind her and saw Xiao Yu standing beside the stairway. She looked at them with an exasperated expression, “Miss Lin, why are you here? Do you know that the temperature can get dangerously high in the day?”

Before Lin Sanjiu could react, Hu Changzai quietly exclaimed “Sh*t!” and immediately ran toward the exit. This time, his movements were considerably quick. He pushed open the door and ran out outside into the blazing sun.

“Hu Changzai! I know it's you! You just wait! I will definitely report this to Executive Chen!” Xiao Yu shouted, chasing after him unforgivingly. When she saw that he was out of sight, she turned to face Lin Sanjiu and said stiffly, “Miss Lin, go to bed!”

She did not understand why Xiao Yu's attitude could become sour so quickly. Lin Sanjiu followed Xiao Yu to the stairway, and

after considering about it for a moment, she mildly explained, “I met him coincidentally, so we exchanged some words. I just wanted to get to know this place a little better...”

Xiao Yu, who was in front of her, walked hurriedly without giving a reply, acting as if she didn’t hear Lin Sanjiu. Lin Sanjiu was a little pissed and decided not to speak. She thought about Hu Changzai’s unfinished sentence... [What did he have to say?]

At the entrance of Basement One, Xiao Yu, whose anger had not fully retreated, looked at her and forced a stiff smile, “Miss Lin, I sounded a little too harsh. Don’t take it to heart. Rules were made in Oasis to keep everyone safe. You shouldn’t leave the basement after a certain time. I am an administrator for Building 42, if someone doesn’t follow the rules, I’ll be punished. Please understand.”

Lin Sanjiu did not want to quarrel with anyone on the very first day, so she nodded showing that she understood. Xiao Yu immediately smiled as pleasantly as before and entered Basement One with her. The basement floor was very quiet. All Oasis members probably abode by those rules, and only a few people were in the corridor. Lin Sanjiu lifted the curtains to her cubicle number 1629. Unintentionally, her gaze landed and hovered over a figure some distance away. That person looked too familiar.

Chapter 38: An Unexpected Level-Up

To be more accurate, the mattress was actually a thin black blanket. When she laid on it, she could smell a faint sour stench and even the bed board... Lin Sanjiu flipped to her side, and the bed made a sharp, unpleasant creak.

Even though it was totally dark, Lin Sanjiu could still clearly see everything within her small cubicle. The air circulation in the basement was poor, so there was a musty smell in the air. There were a few nails on the walls of the cubicle, which was probably used for hanging clothes. The condition of the space was considerably shabby — she could even hear the sound of her sleeping neighbor scratching herself despite the walls. As she laid in her bed unable to fall asleep, she wondered if it was because of the new environment.

If the people here only developed their heat-resistance ability through medication just as Hu Changzai described, she did not see the point of staying. After all, her main purpose of joining Oasis as a member was to find a Consular Officer and not due to the availability of food and water here. [What was the possibility of a Consular Officer being here since this large group almost consist of only normal people?]

However, it didn't seem right to leave immediately after they had just arrived. Lin Sanjiu did not know why but she suddenly recalled that suspicious figure she happened to see. [It's alright, we can stay a few days here and observe the situation...]

Disjointed thoughts ran through her mind, and before she knew it, her eyelids gradually grew heavier, and she grew drowsy. Just as she was about to fall asleep, an intense current flowed through her entire body...

Lin Sanjiu opened her eyes instantly as she suddenly shivered uncontrollably. The tremors from her body were so violent that

her bed frame started producing “thud thud thud” sounds, which rang out distinctively through the quiet environment. She wanted to move her fingers, but she found that she had lost control over her body just as before... Even though the current running through her body did not feel the same, it was not entirely foreign to her. [Damn it! Why did my ability choose such a poor timing to evolve!]

Gritting her teeth, she intended to fling herself onto the floor since the bed frame was too noisy and might attract attention. During this period, there was no way she could defend herself, it would be terrible if a stranger came in now... Even though Oasis seemed peaceful, she did not want to take such risks.

However, she was not even able to move, so how could it be easy for her to flip herself over?

Using the momentum of her body movements, she managed to push herself slightly away from the wall, and her long hair slid from the bed. [This isn't enough...] Lin Sanjiu thought anxiously to herself. But she was too late. Her neighbor's deep breathing sounds suddenly stopped, then she heard a creak from her neighbor's bed. The person seemed to have gotten up. Thereafter, she heard footsteps heading for 1629's entrance. The footsteps stopped at the curtains.

“Hey... are you new here?” a woman lectured softly in a dissatisfied voice. “How could you do such a thing right now when everyone is sleeping? Don't you two have any shame! Stop it now!”

Even though she had lost control over her body, her mind was still clear. Lin Sanjiu was stunned for two seconds before she realized what her neighbor meant. She could feel herself almost vomiting blood — that woman has mistaken her for doing that! Though, she couldn't deny that the bed was making a lot of noise.

The woman waited for a while outside, but the noise continued in a rhythmic manner. She finally felt a little suspicious and lifted the curtain. She immediately cried out in shock when she saw Lin

Sanjiu, “Hey, are you alright?”

Despite being unable to speak, Lin Sanjiu felt a momentary wave of relief which was quickly replaced by anxiousness once again. The neighbor that rushed in was a long-haired woman in her thirties and was wearing a light-yellow Winnie-the-Pooh pajama. The woman was rather decisive as she immediately helped Lin Sanjiu down from her bed and propped her head on her thigh.

“Hey, can you speak?” The woman hit Lin Sanjiu’s face repeatedly, as the slapping sounds rang out. “Is this one of your epilepsy seizures?”

Lin Sanjiu could no longer tell if she was trembling due to the evolution or due to her anger.

Thankful, the process was rather short. After a brief period, she gradually calmed down and regained control over her body. Once she discovered that she could move on her own accord, Lin Sanjiu immediately leaped up from the woman’s thigh. She glared at the woman for a second; she wanted to say something but realized that the woman did nothing wrong, so she finally managed to force herself to say, “I’m okay. Thank you.”

The woman gave her a blank look without leaving. Instead, the woman asked, “What sort of illness do you have? Does this happen frequently? Does this happen frequently when you sleep? Do I have to request Xiao Yu to change a room for you?”

The woman was driving her mad, Lin Sanjiu gritted her teeth and snarled, “I am not sick! You don’t understand. This is just a normal reaction that happens when your ability evolves.”

“Huh?” As expected, the woman was shocked and started observing her from top to bottom. “You evolved naturally? Me too!”

Lin Sanjiu felt a sudden rush of disappointment as her vengeance failed her — Lin Sanjiu sighed, “So, why can’t you tell?”

“I didn’t know this... I arrived here very early. My abilities did not evolve further even though I’ve been here for some time.”

This was most likely because Oasis was too peaceful.

“Okay... Anyway, I should still thank you for your help. I’m Lin Sanjiu, and you are?” Lin Sanjiu quickly adjusted her emotions and extended her hand out to the woman.

The woman touched her hand very briefly, and Lin Sanjiu just took it for a handshake. Following which, the woman replied, “I am Fang Dan. Let’s try to keep our distance. After all, I don’t know how long you’ll survive.”

After she said these mysterious words, Fang Dan stood up, turning to leave.

[Does this mean that the posthumans living in Oasis are all weirdos without any social skills?] Lin Sanjiu had a strong urge to bury her face in her hands to lament.

“Hey, what do you mean by that?”

Fang Dan looked back at her innocently, “New members like you with strong abilities are usually assigned to difficult missions. So, the survival rate of your type is not high,” after she said that, the woman left without showing much concern.

Lin Sanjiu watched as she left, not knowing what to say. The walls were simply not soundproof so she could clearly hear Fang Dan returning and lying back on her own bed. Within ten minutes, the soft snoring noise returned.

[It’s psychologically suffocating to speak to that woman!] Lin Sanjiu ranted inwardly, not taking to heart about Fang Dan’s comments about the difficult missions. She had already gone through her fair share of strange and dangerous experiences, here in this Hyperthermal Hell. [Was it even possible for Oasis’s missions to be more lethal than that pocket dimension?]

From the sounds she heard, Lin Sanjiu concluded that Fang Dan

was fast asleep. After lying in the dark for a long time, Lin Sanjiu finally stretched her palms out cautiously.

She decided to check the state of her ability — This time, when the evolution was complete, she had an intense impulse to summon out a card. It was quite clear to her that this advancement was related to her card ability. With a simple thought, a card appeared in her hand. There was no sign of the usual white flash. Instead, the card appeared without any sign.

Chapter 39: Neither These Cards nor People Allay My Worries

The card in her hand was entirely new to her since there wasn't a failed crayon drawing. Instead, the card was totally black and extremely beautiful.

When she flipped open the card, she discovered these silver words:

【Congratulations on leveling up! 1】

Introduction: This is a card that appears the first time your active ability increase by a level. This card will give a detailed explanation of Lin Sanjiu's active ability. Thus, it is important for the named human to keep this card properly and not lose this card to prevent this critical information from leaking out.

Active Skill: Planar World

Level-up Count: 1

Forecast date of Next Level-up: Some unknown time far into the future

Level-up benefits: Hey, after leveling up, you can convert up to eight items. By the way, the drawings are so much nicer. In addition to that, you finally gained increased control over your cards! Most importantly, you now possess the ability to summon a Diary Card! Woot!

“What sort of f*ckery is this? How was the name Planar World conceived?” Lin Sanjiu could not help mumbling to herself. “What the hell is this Diary Card?”

As if the black card could understand her, the words faded and were replaced with a different paragraph.

【Diary Card】

Even though this is called Diary card, that doesn't mean you can summon this card every day, okay? As for the specific occasion you can summon it? Well, please try continuously! Experience is the true way of life!

“If you don't give me any proper information, I'm going to tear you up!”

The words immediately changed.

【Diary Card】

After the card has been summoned, it can record everything within the surroundings of the card. The level of the owner's ability determines the detailedness and extensiveness of the information recorded.

Duration: 3 hours. The recording will stop after the 3 hours' limit. The information on the card must be erased before the next recording.

Recording Range: Anything within a five-meter radius or less, determined by the actual surface where the card is placed.

Note: This card can be seen by anyone, cannot be controlled remotely and is prone to damage. Please hide it appropriately.

“Huh? Even though this doesn't have any combat value, it does seem useful.” This roused Lin Sanjiu's interest, so she placed the explanation card aside and stretched open her left hand.

She commanded softly, “Diary Card.” There was no response.

“Diary Card.” Once again, there was no response.

“Is it really so hard to summon this card...” Lin Sanjiu rambled to herself dejectedly. Just then, she eyes swept over the explanation card unintentionally. She realized that the words on the card had already changed at some unknown time. Right now, it wrote: “When summoning, please use a sincere tone to say the words: ‘I'm going to write in my diary now.’ Any card that appears

whenever it's called is a dog.”

Lin Sanjiu could feel the veins in her forehead pulsating — she really could not get used to this, how could the cards she “created” had such terrible attitudes? She clenched her teeth and commanded softly, “I’m going to write in my diary now!”

Just as she prepared herself to shout this repeatedly like an idiot, her palm budged slightly. Suddenly, a white card appeared.

The size of the card was the same as her previous cards, but it had lines just like a notebook. She thought for a while and coughed twice. Just as she expected, a line of words suddenly appeared: Lin Sanjiu coughed twice.

“Interesting!” She smiled, surprised. With another flash of thought, she kept the card. She laid on her bed, feeling very satisfied as a wave of sleepiness washed over her. If she had gained her ability yesterday, she wouldn’t have to risk using the walkie-talkie... [If it works wherever I paste this card, wouldn’t it function like a surveillance camera!] Hazy thoughts drifted through her mind.

After being tormented for the entire morning, she finally closed her eyes and fell asleep on the unfamiliar bed. She did not know how long she slept but through her drowsiness, she was awakened by the gradually increasing noises of conversations, people walking, and things being knocked. She opened her eyes and found that the basement had been lit up.

Even though only a few fluorescent lights were switched on, Lin Sanjiu was stunned when she woke up. After one month without seeing any artificial lighting, she could not help feeling emotional. It was as though human civilization was slowly recovering with those few dimly lit fluorescent light. Apparently, it was time for everyone to wake up. Most of the Oasis members in Basement One had already woken up, so the confined space was abuzz with conversations and random noises. Hazily, she sat up in her bed,

wondering if she should look for Luther and Marcie.

“Yo! Are you awake?” Fang Dan lifted the curtain to Lin Sanjiu’s cubicle, revealing her usually stoic face. “You should pack your things. It’s dinnertime now.”

Once she heard this, she realized that she was a little hungry. Lin Sanjiu thanked her and asked, “Typically after dinner, what does everyone do?”

“Our duties, of course. We each have our own jobs. Take me for example, I belong to the water well maintenance group.”

“There is a well here?” Lin Sanjiu finally got it — that was why they have cooked rice! It seemed that the high temperature only caused the evaporation of surface water, but water could still be obtained from underground sources. “But, why is it necessary to maintain a well?”

“That’s quite obvious. After all, it’s not like in the past. If we leave it as it is, even the groundwater from the well will dry up quickly. Besides, after we get the water from the well, it has to be treated, the temperature has to be controlled, and we have to transport it to the canteen. This all fall within our job.” Fang Dan gave it some thought and said, “Tonight, after dinner, you may be assigned a job. Sigh. A neighbor is difficult to come by, and you’ll be gone just like that.”

The way she spoke was as if Lin Sanjiu was already dead. Lin Sanjiu couldn’t help rolling her eyes and not giving a verbal response to that. She was just about to ask some questions regarding Professor Bai when a sharp whistle pierced through the air. Suddenly, everyone started moving. Within minutes, she heard countless footsteps hurrying past her cubicle. Without waiting for Lin Sanjiu questions, Fang Dan called out to her, “The canteen is opened now, let’s go!”

“Wait, what about my two other friends...”

Lin Sanjiu had just gotten out from her cubicle, she had not even finished her sentence, but the hungry crowd of people behind her had already pushed her forward. She walked together with the crowd involuntarily and spotted Fang Dan ahead of her, caught up in the crowd in a similar fashion. Fang Dan turned to her and shouted, but Lin Sanjiu could not hear what she was trying to say.

Despite being stronger than most of the people in the crowd, it was impossible for her to push aside everyone in front of her... Lin Sanjiu could only grimace as she was pushed into the main hall of the building. Only after she was out on the empty space in front of the building, did she finally managed to catch her breath and pause for a moment. She looked around her and discovered that Oasis took on a very different atmosphere at night.

There was a large searchlight on the roof of each of the buildings. These searchlights lit up the entire factory compound. She could hear the whirring sounds from a backup generator which she could not locate; the three-story canteen in the distant was brightly lit, and the sound of the noisy crowd filled in the air.

Seeing the lights and crowd, smelling the off-and-on aroma from the food, Lin Sanjiu felt as if she was in a reverie. For a moment, she forgot that she was still in Hyperthermal Hell.

“Xiao Jiu!” she heard a familiar voice from a distance, someone was trying their best to call out to her. Lin Sanjiu turned behind and spotted Marcie. Marcie looked anxious as she tried to push her way through the crowd toward Lin Sanjiu, frantically waving her arms.

“Why are you alone?” she responded quickly, drawing the stares from the people around her. “Where is Luther?” she asked.

Marcie sighed, replying, “When we were coming out from the building, Luther’s ability suddenly evolved! I don’t have enough strength to carry him, but then I saw you. Help! Quick!”

Chapter 40: The Level-Up Resulted in Another...

Luther collapsed at a location which couldn't have been worst—he fell right at the entrance of the building. When Lin Sanjiu and Marcie rushed over, a large crowd had already gathered around him, creating a terrible obstruction at the main doorway. Within the crowd, there were people trying to exit—throwing expletives, shouting furiously for people to get out of the way; there were others who were just interested in the commotion; also, some who were beckoning for help... It was simply chaotic.

At that point, Lin Sanjiu couldn't care less. Grabbing people by their collars, she tossed aside anyone who dared to stand in her way. After a short time, ignoring the barrage of discontented complaints, she and Marcie finally reached the center of the crowd with her leading the way.

They spotted Luther laying on the ground, his face was pale, and his eyes were shut tightly as his body was racked with mild jerks. His clothes were dirty, and there were even quite a few visible footprints on his pants, probably because he was stepped on when he fell suddenly. Chen Jinfeng arrived at the scene at some unknown time and was crouching beside Luther, "Please give us some space. Someone just fainted, so stop crowding around here!"

Since he was an executive, his words carried weight; the people in the crowd who recognized him quickly help to disseminate his message, clearing away the crowd. Marcie was grateful and quickly thanked him with a smile, "Executive Chen, when did you arrive here? Thank you so much."

Lin Sanjiu also nodded gratefully at him and pulled Luther up, placing his left arm around her shoulders. Seeing that Lin Sanjiu had helped Luther up, Chen Jinfeng dusted the dirt off his pants and stood up. Facing both women, he said, "It should be alright

now since the two of you are here. There is an infirmary in Building 38, you can bring him there. Don't worry about dinner, I'll get someone to send it over."

"Thank you. But he'll be fine, it's just a minor chronic condition!" Without explaining further, Lin Sanjiu hurriedly added, "We'll just bring him back to his room to rest." Chen Jinfeng responded with a reserved nod and left without saying anything.

"Executive Chen speaks in a rather ostentatious way, but I didn't expect him to be quite a decent guy," Marcie commented thoughtfully as she pulled Luther's right arm over her shoulders and struggled to walk forward. Lin Sanjiu nodded in agreement.

It wasn't easy for them both to walk against the stream of hungry crowd—people pushed and shoved, and they had to even retreat a little several times. Fed up by this, Lin Sanjiu disregarded any common courtesy and started shoving people aside roughly. With much effort, they made their way to Luther's cubicle.

After they had placed Luther on his bed, the two drained women finally had time to catch their breath. They sat on the floor and started chatting casually while they waited for Luther to regain consciousness.

"This morning, my ability leveled up too." Lin Sanjiu grinned, "I think our experience with that pocket dimension was a pretty big trigger."

Marcie nodded wistfully before sighing, "I don't even know if my abilities will evolve..."

Marcie had always been the weakest among the three of them—her nails could only be used for drawing blood and were quite useless for anything else as they were as brittle as glass. Each time they found themselves in trouble, she had to grab an available weapon before she could join in to help. Honestly, even though she was slighter stronger than a normal person, she was no expert

martial artist after all.

Over the past month, Lin Sanjiu came to realize a natural law regarding her newfound abilities: Evolved Abilities need to be stimulated just like knives that need to be sharpened. The presence of posthumans here at Oasis, with abilities that did not develop past their initial forms, gave her further proof. Their lives were probably too stable or too safe...

“Maybe you have to use your ability more frequently,” Lin Sanjiu suggested. “I just got to know two other Posthumans. Maybe they’ll allow you to draw their blood for analysis.”

After that, she recounted what had happened in the morning with full details—from the walkie-talkie being taken, Xiao Yi’s being unnaturally strict, including how Oasis members used medicine to induce their ability to resist the heat.

“I don’t know if I am being overly cautious, but I just think we have to be careful,” Lin Sanjiu concluded.

“Of course, isn’t it obvious?” someone replied coldly.

Before she was aware, her body already reacted to the abnormality of those words and goosebumps appeared all over her skin. With frozen expressions, Marcie and Lin Sanjiu turned to look.

Luther was already awake, propping himself up on the bed with one arm. With a perked eyebrow, he looked at them both with indifference. Lin Sanjiu had never seen Luther wearing that expression. His facial features and hair were still the same, yet with a single expression, he exuded an entirely different aura. He lost his usual lively, immature temperament and instead appeared to be as cold as ice. Previously, Luther could be described as a talkative young man, but the person in front of them was like a thing... wearing a human suit. Human-like but lacking an element of humanity.

With his uncharacteristic tone, he sounded quite unlike his usual self, “Why are both of you looking at me like that?” while he said this, he observed his own palms and fingers, almost engrossed. The room was filled with an odd atmosphere as nobody answered him even after a long time.

Marcie gulped. Lin Sanjiu could hear that clearly as the room was painfully quiet. Marcie grabbed her own hair as if she had a massive headache and muttered, “Agh!”

With an agonized look on her face, she uttered, “So, you are next!”

“What... what? What do you mean?” Lin Sanjiu could not make sense of the situation. Ignoring Lin Sanjiu’s confused face, Luther sat up holding his chin in one hand as a vaguely enigmatic sneer settled upon his face like a frigid winter fog.

“Crops with growth cycle reduced to 30 days? Heat insulation? Medicine that can induce abilities? Don’t tell me you believe all that crap just like this herd of idiotic pigs here?” even though he spoke with a gentle tone, his scathing remark seemed fully loaded with malice. “Are you scared out of your wits by duoluozhongs? Don’t you realize what this implies?”

Lin Sanjiu stared blankly at Luther. Even without activating her Keen Senses, she could tell that other than his face, she no longer recognized the person in front of her. Inevitably, a question escaped her lips: “Who are you?”

This time, before “Luther” could reply, Marcie grudgingly replied, almost groaning, “Xiao Jiu, let me introduce you to... Luther’s seventh personality, Septimus[1].”

Lin Sanjiu felt mind-blown as she continued staring at “Luther” in shock.

Luther—no, Septimus looked toward Lin Sanjiu and curved his lips upward into somewhat of a smile, almost as if giving a beggar

alms, “Luther won’t be coming out for a while, you better get used to having me around.”

Translator's note: [1] Septimus’s name does not translate well in pinyin as it loses its meaning. The original pinyin is Feng Qiqi which can be roughly translated as “seven seven”.

Chapter 41: Let's Get on with Proper Business

Lin Sanjiu inhaled deeply. The cubicle must have been empty for some time because she immediately felt an irritation in her lungs due to the dust in the air. But that was the least of her concerns...

“Seventh? Marcie, can you tell me how many personalities Luther possesses?” she asked, trying to keep her composure.

“Err... Apart from Luther’s own dominant personality, he had been diagnosed with twelve other observable personalities. At least, that was before the New World descended...” Marcie’s words trailed off as she grabbed her red hair in frustration.

Throwing a glance at Septimus’s idle face, Lin Sanjiu still could not come to terms with what had happened. “So, why haven’t I met this personality?”

“The other personalities are dormant right now. A personality only emerges when it is about to take on a corporeal form. After the awoken personality ‘occupies’ Luther’s body for some time, it will take on an independent corporeal form... just like me,” Marcie tried her best to explain as she looked agitatedly at Septimus. “We didn’t mean to keep this from you. We just couldn’t tell when the next personality would emerge. Look, I have almost been in this form for 28 months before Septimus...”

Taking a sharp breath, Marcie faced Lin Sanjiu directly and said, “Besides, among all the other eleven personalities, my relationship with this guy is the worst.”

Septimus seemed to agree with her wholeheartedly as he nodded his head and added, “We hate each other.”

“Huh, why?” Lin Sanjiu suddenly didn’t know whether to laugh or to cry.

“He is genderless, but his personality is the worst! Egotistic,

arrogant, and rude!” Marcie exploded, ignoring the fact that the person she was insulting was right there with them. “I don’t know how this androgynous fellow can be so conceited!”

[Genderless...] Lin Sanjiu turned to look at Septimus with her mouth wide open, but she was still looking at Luther’s face so she really couldn’t tell.

After hearing those words, Septimus’s expression didn’t even change one bit. He(?) picked the dirt from his nails and retorted, “Biologically speaking, the sole purpose for the existence of two sexes is just for sexual reproduction. Marcie, it seems like you are still hung up on the fact that you lack such functionality.”

Septimus really stirred up the hornet’s nest when he said those words. Marcie leaped up from the ground, clenching her fist as she got ready to pounce on him. Lin Sanjiu pulled Marcie back hurriedly, as words shot out from her mouth, “That is Luther’s body! Luther’s body...” It took some effort for her to finally dissuade Marcie.

Before she could breathe a sigh of relief, Septimus interjected, as if eager to stir up more trouble, “Ha. Your ability didn’t even progress one bit, but you still have quite the temper.”

Lin Sanjiu now knew why their relationship was so poor—she was at her wit’s end. She restrained Marcie, whose face had turned fuming red while she glared at Septimus, shouting, “Cut to the chase and stop this nonsense!”

“Fine, I really do have something to say anyway.” Septimus repositioned his pillow against the wall, finding a comfortable position to lean back before he continued leisurely, “Aside from those unbelievable lies that these Oasis people spew, what do you plan to do next? What’s your goal?”

His questions stumped both Lin Sanjiu and Marcie. They quickly exchanged glances and muttered unconfidently, “We can stay here for some time, have a look at this place...”

“Since, we are already here...”

Septimus made a dismissive tut-tut sound as a cryptic smile appeared on his face. Despite having the same facial features and even the same body, a single expression from the “Luther” in front of her simply changed his entire persona. He bent over whispering to the two of them sitting on the floor, “Didn’t we came here to look for a Consular Officer? Have both of you forgotten?”

To tell the truth, even though Lin Sanjiu had not forgotten about it, she did not give it a deeper thought. Now that Septimus brought it up, she found herself speechless.

“But most of the members here are just normal people, will we even find a Consular Officer here?” Marcie carped.

“With 1800 people here, I think it’ll still be worthwhile trying.” Septimus refuted, “That’s unless you know where we can find another base filled with only posthumans.”

Seething with anger, Marcie refused to speak.

“If we don’t find one here, we have to move on quickly,” Septimus’s tone became resolute when he saw that both women had no objections. “We still have 12 months and 23 days to do this, we shouldn’t waste all this time in Oasis.”

[That’s right.] Lin Sanjiu agreed with him inwardly. Septimus may have an odd personality, but Lin Sanjiu was surprised to know that he was clear-headed. Just as she was about to speak, someone suddenly shouted from outside, “Miss Lin, which room are all of you in?” it was Xiao Yu’s voice.

Lin Sanjiu lifted the curtains and stuck her head out to look. What greeted her was a narrow snake-like corridor flanked by densely packed cubicles, she had no idea where Xiao Yu was. She raised her voice and yelled back, “Is that you, Xiao Yu? We are at 1734! What’s the matter?”

“Executive Chen informed us that someone in your group was

not well. I'm here to deliver your dinners," Xiao Yu explained as she walked toward Luther's cubicle, carrying a few traditional metal lunchboxes. She was rather quick, so she reached them in no time. As if she had totally forgotten the unpleasant incident in the morning, Xiao Yu handed the lunchboxes to Lin Sanjiu cheerfully, as she asked, "Who was unwell? We have an infirmary, why didn't you go over?"

Even though metal products didn't melt like plastic under the Hyperthermal Hell's temperatures, they could get very hot. Lin Sanjiu placed the lunchboxes on the bed hastily and thanked Xiao Yu, "It's just a minor condition, he'll be fine once he rests up. Have you eaten? Do you want to eat with us?"

"Nah, thanks for your offer. I've already eaten," Xiao Yu replied politely. She frowned when she saw "Luther" smiling, she seemed to sense that something was different about him, but she did not bring it up. Luckily, she did not mull over it but instead smiled at them and said, "After you finish your dinner, please bring the lunchboxes back to the canteen. Please go over to Executive Chen's office after that. It is in Building 37, 306 on the 3rd floor. You will be assigned your duties today."

Lin Sanjiu suddenly recalled what Fang Dan said to her. She hesitated for a moment, then she smiled and asked, "Do you know what jobs we'll be assigned?"

She did not know if it was her misperception, but Xiao Yu's smile suddenly turned ambiguous, "You'll find out once you're there."

Chapter 42: The Mission and the Team Leader

Chen Jinfeng's office was in a building right beside the entrance of the compound. When the three of them exited the canteen, everyone in Oasis had started their duties under the curtain of night. Under the illumination of the searchlight, they could see people moving around orderly, handling their own responsibility. In contrast, it made the three of them, who were leisurely strolling to their next destination, particularly out of place.

Obviously, the one who slowed them down was Septimus. He was very interested about everything in Oasis, he observed their surroundings unhurriedly as if he were a tourist. Even when the other two protested, he wanted to look at everything in detail. When they approached the main entrance of the compound, he suddenly softly exclaimed, "Oh?"

"What's wrong with you again?" Marcie rolled her eyes at him without showing a shred of courtesy toward him. Septimus appeared unaffected as he smiled back at her and gestured with his chin at the door. Lin Sanjiu followed his gaze.

Even on such a peaceful day, there were still five burly, pot-bellied men sitting by the entrance. As they guarded the entrance, they sat with their legs crossed, ankles on their knees. They were chatting randomly while two of them even held a hatchet each. Just when Lin Sanjiu turned her eyes to them, one of the men pulled out a cigarette from behind his ears and checked his own pockets. "I didn't bring my lighter!" he immediately cursed.

Another man beside him laughed and said something inaudible before he held the tip of the cigarette. In the darkness, they could see his fingers gradually glowing red, it became brighter and brighter. Then, the cigarette was lit, and a stream of smoke rose from the cigarette. The others did not even raise their brows, it

was apparent that they were already used to this.

This should actually be a good sign for them—this meant that there were still quite a few posthumans in Oasis—but Lin Sanjiu immediately understood Septimus’s concern. Putting aside other dubious issues... why did they have to place so many guards at the entrance. What were they guarding against?

She continued ruminating about the matter even as they climbed up to the 3rd floor of Building 37 and found room 306. She went ahead and knocked on the door.

“Ah, another visitor!”

They heard someone laughing and a stranger opened the door for them. The three of them were stunned. The stranger in front of them was a young man that was very tall, he was about 190 cm and was about the same age as Luther. He had an athlete's physique beneath the blue hoodie he wore. He warmly welcomed them into the room: “Are the three of you new here? Welcome! Welcome! We will need to look out for each other in the future!”

Lin Sanjiu and the others were bewildered as they walked into the room. They were shocked immediately when they saw that Chen Jin Feng’s small office could actually fit that many people. There was a tanned, muscular man who looked as if he was made of steel. He wore a sleeveless shirt and stood in one corner crossing his arms with closed eyes as he rested. An attractive woman stood beside him. They could not tell her age, but her head of large curls gave her a seductive allure. She carried a young girl in her arms, the girl looked like she hasn't been in elementary school for long. She was about eight or nine and even wore two French braids. Within the group, she saw a familiar face, Hu Changzai. With the inclusion of Sanjiu’s group, the ten people filled every inch of that 10m² room, it was even a little difficult to turn around.

“Uh... does this mean that all of you here are also waiting to be assigned a duty?” Lin Sanjiu rushed to ask softly, directing her

question at the tall young man who seemed very affable.

“Oh, so Luther and you guys are here. Great! All the members of this squad are here!”

That young man nodded when Chen Jinfeng’s voice suddenly rang out within the room. Lin Sanjiu scanned the room but couldn’t spot him. She only saw him when that muscular man shifted and Chen Jinfeng squeezed out from the spot behind him with much difficulty. Chen Jinfeng walked to the center of the room, waving the piece of paper in his hand and announced loudly, “Everyone, pay attention now. First, I’ll brief you on today’s mission!”

The suddenly quietened down as eight pairs of eyes locked their gaze at Chen Jinfeng.

“According to the yesterday night’s report from our scouting team, the small group of duoluozhongs in the west have already started wandering around the area near Long Hua Road. It is only a 20 minutes walk from Long Hua Road to our factory compound. This is already a dangerous distance for us, so the mission today for this squad is to head west, seek out the small group of duoluozhongs and attack them. You have to destroy this potential threat! I will pass the specific report to your team leader. Your team leader will lead the mission today. Does anyone have any questions?” Chen Jinfeng looked at the group.

The mission didn’t sound difficult, and the planned course was straightforward, so no one raised any objections. The room remained silent for a few seconds. Hu Changzai looked around him and realized that nobody else showed any intention to talk. After feeling conflicted for some time, he finally raised his hand and asked, “Uh... uh... who is our team leader?”

Suddenly, an unfathomable expression flashed across Chen Jinfeng’s face. It was quickly followed with a cough as he looked down at the piece of paper in his hand, “Let me introduce all of you

to your team leader, Student Xu Xiaoyang. She will be heading the mission today.”

[Student... Xu Xiaoyang?]

Just when Lin Sanjiu had her suspicion about that form of address, the little girl with the french braids stood up. She nodded to the group and said in a crisp voice, “Hello everybody. I am your team leader, Xu Xiaoyang. I will need all your cooperation for the mission later.” The room fell silent again.

If the previous silence was because nobody wanted to be singled out, this silence was because everyone was struck dumb. The only two people in the room with unchanged expressions were Chen Jinfeng and that seductive long-haired woman...

The first person who could not restrain himself was that tanned, muscular block. He immediately straightened his back. With a dark face, he stared at Chen Jinfeng and shouted out, “You are telling us that this silly little girl is the team leader? Executive Chen, are you joking?”

Chen Jinfeng hung down his eyes, not even bothering to look at that man, “I would never make a joke out of this. This is a decision we made after much consideration. Tie Dao, you must cooperate with your Team Leader Xu for this mission.”

The muscular man immediately rebutted with a “Ha?” With a rebellious tone, he mocked, “Even if I call you Executive. Don’t think too highly of yourself. If you want me to listen and follow this silly little girl, I won’t do this!”

Lin Sanjiu took a glimpse at Xu Xiaoyang even before she knew why. A loud “bang” rang out in the room as the strong, muscular Tie Dao was thrown against the wall like a rag. The wall trembled for a while as a large piece of reflective material fell from off.

As the dust settled all over him, Tie Dao himself was so shocked that he forgot about his anger. The person who had thrown him

against the wall was the silent, slender, long-haired woman.

Chapter 43: Up to Something Sneaky

A deadly silence hung in the air as the attractive woman turned around to look at the group, her pair of phoenix eyes^[1] revealed no emotions. Her scarlet red lips parted, and with a flat tone, she directed her question at the group: “Does anyone still have any objections toward Xu Xiaoyang being the team leader?” Xu Xiaoyang continued looking down, toying with her braids with one of her hands and did not say her word. The way she acted was as if the incident had nothing to do with her.

For a moment, nobody spoke, as their faces each held different expressions.

Just then, Tie Dao, who was slumping in one corner of the room, struggled to get up. Feeling a slight itch, he wiped his forehead offhandedly. When he lowered his head to look at his hand, he found that it was covered by a sticky layer of blood. His blood-covered hand instantly provoked his anger! Tie Dao suddenly bellowed, “You motherf*cker!”. He rushed head-first toward the woman with lightning speed.

“Quick! Stop him!” Chen Jinfeng yelled furiously while he pushed the tall young man forward. The young man was stunned for a moment, he seemed slightly unwilling to do so—but just as Tie Dao was about to reach the woman, the young man quickly bear-hugged Tie Dao around his waist. With the strength of his arms, the young man actually managed to pull Tie Dao back.

Despite how fit Tie Dao looked, he was forced to the ground when the young man tackled him. The only thing Tie Dao could do was kick around and continue with his curses. Almost immediately, the room was filled with a slew of expletives that was so loud that it hurt the ears of the people in the room.

“Tut-tut. Quite the hidden talent,” Septimus whispered to Lin Sanjiu.

Lin Sanjiu agreed because she knew exactly how it unfolded. When Tie Dao thrust forward, a piece of tile was crushed by the force of his feet, and a shallow dent appeared on the floor. Even with that strength, he could do nothing against that woman and the young man! If she were to fight with them...

With her heart slightly palpitating, she tried to crush the tile under her feet applying as much force as she could. She tried this a few times, but the floor remained the same, with no damage at all.

“You are all in the same squad! How could you fight amongst yourselves before even starting the mission?” once Chen Jinfeng sensed that the situation was under control, he stepped forward and berated Tie Dao with an exceedingly disappointed tone, “Student Xu Xiaoyang’s strength is well-recognized by us all. We have our reasons to appoint her as the team leader. Tie Dao, such attitude like yours is not tolerated in Oasis!”

Tie Dao knew better than to argue when the odds were against him. Since he was still restrained by the young man, he panted heavily while he stopped struggling. The only thing he could do was to glare at Chen Jinfeng. Chen Jinfeng took it in stride and said to the young man, “Gao Fei, help bring Tie Dao to the infirmary...”

He looked around the room then he suddenly pointed at Marcie, “Miss Marcie, as Tie Dao is injured, could you stay behind to take care of him. Both of you don't have to join today’s mission.”

Lin Sanjiu was a little startled by this, so she shot Marcie a quick glance. “It might not be a bad thing for you to stay behind since it's safer here,” she whispered in Marcie’s ear, “but can you actually stay here by yourself?”

She remembered what Luther said before when they just got to know each other. Strictly speaking, Marcie was still a “product” of his ability so she could not stray too far away from him.

Marcie nodded, “If he is within a 20 mins walking distance, it

should be alright.” With that, she took a quick look at Lin Sanjiu and Septimus and said, “Please be careful out there.” before she turned and followed Gao Fei out of the room.

After the three of them had left, the room felt much larger. Hu Changzai’s face was pale as he shifted away from that attractive woman with a few quick steps, he was probably overwhelmed by that woman’s dangerous aura. After scanning the room, he found Lin Sanjiu, whom he had previously exchange some words with, the most approachable. His face was covered in cold sweat, but he managed to force a smile at Lin Sanjiu and stood right behind her.

[You’re afraid of her, but I’m afraid of her too!] Lin Sanjiu sighed helplessly to herself. When she looked up again, she found Xu Xiaoyang sitting on a chair at the corner of the room. Xu Xiaoyang rocked her two legs listlessly as they dangled over her chair. She was now looking out of the window with a bored expression on her face.

The light from outside washed over her moist skin. As she sulked with her petal-like lips, her childish innocence showed. It appeared genuine and was totally unlike Wang Sisi’s calculated, manipulative pretense. But how could a normal elementary school student...

When she thought of this, she couldn’t resist casting her glance at the attractive woman. The woman continued looking down with an icy expression on her face, unwilling to look at anyone. The atmosphere in the room was painfully tense, but Chen Jinfeng seemed to unbothered. He hummed a little tune as he returned to sit behind his office table and even started reading his documents contentedly. Given the cold-shoulder, Lin Sanjiu and the others waited as if they were on pins and needles. Gao Fei finally returned, and when he just pushed out the door, he said, “Executive Chen,” Xu Xiaoyang jumped up from her chair and clapped her hands together, smiling, “you’re finally back! Let’s go!” after saying that, she pushed Gao Fei out of the door. “We will

set off now!” she informed Chen Jinfeng without even turning her head.

“Oh, you're leaving just like that? Okay, I hope everything goes well and wish all of you success!” Chen Jinfeng smiled as he gave his file a tap but basically, no one gave a damn about him. The attractive woman had already started following behind Xu Xiaoyang. She turned back and gave everyone else a threatening glare which was more than enough motivation for them to move. Hu Changzai immediately chased up to them.

The six of them went out of room 306 and headed downstairs. When they were at the entrance of the compound, Xu Xiaoyang handed a piece of paper to one of the men without them even asking. The man scanned through the paper and looked at the squad in front of him. Suddenly, he pursed his lips and pulled open the metal door. Lin Sanjiu was at the back of the group, just when she was about to step out of the door, she noticed that the man was checking her out, then almost as if out of pity, he clicked his tongue.

With a sudden thought in her mind, she mumbled something under her breath while she was about to step outside. Her voice was so soft that Septimus couldn't hear her clearly even though he was just beside. He absentmindedly asked, “What did you say?”

“Nothing, it's not important.” Lin Sanjiu grinned at him as she pushed the door and stepped out of the factory compound.

Sometimes, things are just odd. Even before they were ten steps away from Oasis, they were greeted with a desolation that emphasized the reality of their situation. Behind them, people working in a human basecamp with searchlights on; ahead, there was just a vast stretch of abandoned buildings with deep cracks down their sides. Once again, yellow sand whipped at their faces. Xu Xiaoyang paused and looked around, she narrowed her eyes and asked without even turning behind, “Griselda, can you look at the map and tell me the direction to where the duoluozhongs are?”

[Griselda]

The people in the group were a little surprised as the attractive woman took out a map from her pants pocket. Even before their surprise faded, Lin Sanjiu suddenly exclaimed, “Oh no! I forgot something!” All five people turned to look at her. “Team Leader, can I go over there to search for it, I promise I’ll be back asap. Okay? I just need one minute, just one minute!” Lin Sanjiu smiled at Xu Xiaoyang seeking approval. “If we are going to fight against duoluozhong, I can’t do without it.”

Xu Xiaoyang was very pleased with her attitude, she lifted the corner of her mouth and approved, “Okay, come back quickly.” After that, the little girl shot a glance at Griselda who nodded back to her.

“Sure!” Lin Sanjiu thanked the little girl unconsciously and returned to the entrance of the factory compound. She did not dare to go further as she was afraid that Griselda would think that she was trying to abandon the mission. Her eyes swept over the area, between the cracks of a brick beside the metal door, she saw the white corner of a card. She immediately gave a sigh of relief. When she saw one of the men by the door standing up, looking suspiciously at her, she smiled at him reassuringly, “Our team leader dropped something here just now.”

As she said that, she stuffed the Diary card into her hand quickly.

Translator’s note: Phoenix Eyes describe eyes with a slight upward slant at their tails.

Chapter 44: How Unfortunate That the Girl Refers to Me?

“Hey, how good are you in combat?”

When Hu Changzai walked over to her side and whispered, Lin Sanjiu was just about to check the details on her Diary Card.

“Huh?” Caught unaware, she was a little uncertain how she should reply. “Average, I guess.”

At the same time, their group of six was walking toward the direction of Long Hua Street. “Sha... Sha...” Six pairs of shoes shuffled along the sand covered ground. After that short exchange of words, nobody spoke again. Scorching hot sand dust clouded the air, as a strong wind whistled through the air. Hu Changzai kept one step behind her and remained silent for quite some time. Just when Lin Sanjiu assumed that he had given up speaking to her, he suddenly gave a heavy sigh. He lowered his voice and whispered, “Did you know? I am not supposed to be on this team.”

Lin Sanjiu replied nonchalantly with a curt, “Oh.” She did not understand why Hu Changzai would bring this up to her suddenly. She looked sideways and made sure that he was some distance away from her. Then, she turned her palm that she had been hiding toward herself. Her diary card filled with small little words was right in her palm.

“I am telling you the truth! Ever since I came to Oasis, I have been working with the electrical maintenance team. My main duty was to lower the temperature of the electric generator to prevent it from overheating. I don’t know what happened, but I was suddenly reassigned to the Mission team... Even though I have evolved, how can I use my ability in a fight!?” Hu Changzai ranted dispiritedly. After he had evolved, he had never engaged in any battle, yet now he was expected to hunt down duoluozhongs. He indeed had all the reason to worry.

Lin Sanjiu, who was walking in front of him, continued walking with her head down, minding her own business, as if she didn't hear anything he said. Hu Changzai sighed again and decided to keep quiet. Unexpectedly, she suddenly turned back to look at him with a totally different attitude.

“Did you just say that you were abruptly informed about your reassignment only today?”

Hu Changzai couldn't make sense of the matter, but he pushed up his spectacles and replied, “Yes... I am still puzzled why.”

Unconsciously, Lin Sanjiu gripped her Diary card tightly in her hand.

【Diary Card】

Time: 10:48 PM (Night)

Location: Reunion Food Processing Plant (Entrance)

Parameter: 5m Radius

Man A: “Is this it again?”

Man B: “Yes! There is a rather good-looking woman who recently joined. What a pity.”

Man C: “What is the quota for this team?”

Man B: “From the memo in the team leader's hand, there can only be three survivors this time.”

Man A: “The team leader will definitely return alive. Don't underestimate her just because she is small, she is skilled.”

Man D: “That's right. Lucky for us, we don't have to go out for these missions. Neither did we actually intercept much...”

Man C: “Hey, didn't you offend one of the executives the other time? I heard that you were nearly sent for a mission.”

Man D: “Don't bring that up again. I had to give many of my things away.”

Man D spat.

.....

After that, the card only covered some of the other mundane talk between the guards and stated that Lin Sanjiu returned to the entrance to retrieve the card. The recording stopped at 10:52 pm. Lin Sanjiu stared a little longer at the words “The Diary Card was retrieved” and found herself in a daze for a moment.

If things were just as Man A had described, and there was really a limited quota on the number of survivors, with an unquestionable doubt, the team leader, Xu Shao Yang, will take up a spot. If there were no mishaps, the woman called Griselda will also be on the list of survivors. The remaining people were herself, Septimus, Hu Changzai and Gao Fei—It was almost certain that Hu Changzai will be abandoned.

No matter how she saw it, Lin Sanjiu felt that Septimus and herself were the remaining two marked to die. In an instant, Fang Dan’s words flashed in her mind again.

“This explains why the death rate of the missions is so high,” she mumbled as she quickened her steps and patted Septimus’s shoulder. Since Marcie was not around, Septimus was the closest person to her in this squad. As Septimus turned back, he gave her a puzzled expression. Lin Sanjiu hesitated for a moment, but she finally handed her Diary card to him, “Have a look at this.”

The way she purposely lowered her voice alerted Septimus of the importance of her words. He took the Diary card and covered it slightly with his hand. Whilst no one was noticing, he quickly scanned through it. At the same time, Lin Sanjiu slowed down her pace and pulled Hu Changzai to her side.

“Hey, you are a girl, what are you trying—”

“Are you done? I need to tell you something urgently,” Lin Sanjiu interrupted him impatiently. “Can you ask the team leader

something and check if she is telling the truth?”

“Why? What do you want me to ask?”

“Ask her, ‘Team Leader, I have an appointment at 6 am with someone, do you think I can go back in time?’,” when she said this, Lin Sanjiu emphasized on the word “I”.

“Why should I ask her about that...” Before Hu Changzai could finish his sentence, his perplexed face totally disappeared as if he thought of something, instead his face darkened.

A few drops of sweat appeared on Lin Sanjiu’s forehead as she looked at Hu Changzai, she smiled, “So you’re not stupid.”

Without saying any other nonsense, Hu Changzai took a deep breath and adjusted his expression. He strode toward Xu Xiaoyang who was leading the group. As scathing stifling air enveloped them, Lin Sanjiu could hear their conversation faintly. Hu Changzai posed the question to Xu Xiaoyang without leaving out a single word. Xu Xiaoyang kept silent for a moment and finally replied with her bright childish voice: “Who knows? But we should be done at about 6 am.”

After that, Hu Changzai did not reply. In less than a minute, he returned to Lin Sanjiu with an ashen face. At that moment, Septimus finished reading the Diary card in his hand, he returned it to Lin Sanjiu, and his face also became extremely tense. He looked at Hu Changzai and asked even before Lin Sanjiu could open her mouth, “What happened?”

Hu Changzai shook his head with a heavy expression. “That’s a lie,” he mouthed. All of a sudden, Lin Sanjiu felt her heart sank. Regardless of what Xu Xiaoyang said, it was that, unless she knew very clearly that Hu Changzai will not be able to go back, her words wouldn’t be judged by Hu Changzai as a lie. Suddenly realizing the grim situation he was in, Hu Changzai’s face became overcast with gloom.

Septimus whispered, “So, we are the remaining two?”

Lin Sanjiu replied coldly, “The ‘What a pity.’ comment on the card refers to me.”

“So, will they try to use the duoluozhongs to get rid of us or will they do it themselves?”

“I have no idea, but we should keep our distance from them later... but you could cheat your way back by transforming into one of them.”

“Well, actually...” Septimus suddenly closed his eyes and grimace a little, “Shapeshifting is Luther’s ability, so I can’t use it. At most, I am just a person that is stronger than the average man.”

Lin Sanjiu’s felt her heart stop for a moment and she couldn’t help stopping for a moment. She was just about to say something when she heard Griselda’s sudden yell: “Everyone, look out!”

Chapter 45: I'll Bless and Protect You Even If I Become a Ghost

Ever since the New World descended, this was the first time Lin Sanjiu had seen so many duoluozhongs. Griselda had just blurted out that warning when her voice was drowned by the intense buzzing sounds of delight from the duoluozhongs. Numerous duoluozhongs climbed out from the windows of the buildings along the two sides of the road, waving their mouthparts in mid-air. Their saliva flew everywhere, falling like viscous raindrops on the group. To Lin Sanjiu, this scene was like a swarm of bees moving in and out of their hive.

It was impossible to count the number of duoluozhongs around, and neither did they have the time to do so. But the only thing that was certain was that even if the six of them died, there would not be enough blood to go around.

“This is bulls*it! This is considered a ‘small group’?” Gao Fei was appalled as he cursed softly. He was not the only one, in fact, the six of them were stupefied and were at a loss for a moment.

Under the cacophony of buzzing noises, the duoluozhong nearest to them started climbing down nimbly from the window. Just as they saw it scale down two stories easily, Septimus reacted first, shouting, “Shouldn’t we start running?” Subsequently, he turned and started to run. Unexpectedly, he had only taken a few steps before he nearly collided into Griselda who had rushed over and blocked his path. She gave him an icy stare and showed no sign of giving way.

“None of you are allowed to run back to Oasis!” Xu Xiaoyang yelled from behind him.

“If so many duoluozhongs follow behind us, no one in Oasis will survive!” Xu Xiaoyang turned pale as she said this. No one could tell if she was anxious or angry, but she commanded, “I want you

all to get in there and lead those duoluozhongs away from here!”

Other than Griselda, the remaining four people couldn't believe what they heard. Gao Fei looked at the road ahead of them and stammered, “Team... Team Leader, you must be joking, right? The buildings are all filled with duoluozhongs!”

Lin Sanjiu could feel her heart pounding furiously, her eyes swept the surrounding— on their left, just 50 meters ahead, a few duoluozhongs have already reached the first floor of the building they were at. Xu Xiaoyang snorted, and Griselda immediately threatened all of them, “If anyone tries to run in the opposite direction, you'll have to go through me!”

After she said that, her slender white arm visibly swelled up like a balloon. Her enlarged arm muscles burst open her sleeves, as thick green veins appeared on them, creating a stark contrast with her slender build. Even when she was teaching Tie Dao a lesson, Griselda did not display this strange transformation—she appeared to be very serious about her words. Gao Fei gulped with a face of dismay. For a moment, nobody spoke. Just then, they heard a “thud” and noticed that a duoluozhong had jumped down to the ground.

“It doesn't matter which direction we run, let's just go!” Lin Sanjiu finally shouted, unable to hold back any longer, she dragged Septimus along with her and continued, “I'll make sure that he doesn't run back to Oasis, okay? The duoluozhongs over there are coming!”

Seeing that they could not drag this out any longer, Xu Xiaoyang looked to Griselda and said, “Go!” With that, the latter drove her leg to the ground and sprinted toward Xu Xiaoyang. Griselda carried Xu Xiaoyang in her arms and dashed forward. The rest of them wasted no time following behind them, exerting all the strength they could muster.

Griselda maintained her left arm in that outrageously muscular

form. As she ran, she swung her arm at the duoluozhongs who reached the ground, sending one by one flying into the air. With her opening the path, the rest only had to concentrate on running. They did not know which direction they were running toward, but they ran out of that street with Griselda leading the way. Unfortunately, there were more and more duoluozhongs in front of them, and gradually, Griselda could no longer manage them herself. Finally, even the duoluozhongs from behind chased up to them. It was as if they were trapped in a swamp, their progress became slower and slower.

A duoluozhong suddenly jumped off from the awning of a small convenience store, and right into the middle of their group. They heard an explosive cry from Hu Changzai as he leaped forward and rolled to Lin Sanjiu. Since he did not have an enhanced body, he could be considered the weakest among them. Lin Sanjiu took a quick glance and noticed that the duoluozhong had scraped off a piece of flesh from his calf, leaving a deep bloody wound. Without a second thought, she released her grip on Septimus and threw out a card. The card turned into a police baton in mid-air and fell heavily on the duoluozhong. It backed off and fell to the ground. After that, she hauled Hu Changzai up by his collar. “Place your arm on my shoulder! Try to bear with the pain and keep up!” she shouted. Hu Changzai’s face was drained of color as he tried his best to reposition his weight on his uninjured leg. Stumbling and staggering, he managed to run for a while with Lin Sanjiu’s help. However, he was heavier than Lin Sanjiu, so she realized, while panting heavily, that both were now a long distance away from the group. At this point, they couldn’t even see Griselda who was leading ahead.

Seeming to notice this, a duoluozhong slowed down and suddenly made a creepy hair-raising sound. It turned back and headed toward the two little “lambs” who had fallen behind.

“I can’t... can’t go on. You should just run without me. Thank...

thank you,” Hu Changzai said in a hoarse voice, putting a brave face, he uttered, “I’ll bless and protect you even if I become a ghost...”

“Don’t spout nonsense if you don’t know how to talk!” Lin Sanjiu rebuked with a gruff voice. A large drop of sweat rolled down her forehead, passing through her eyebrow and right into her eye—she felt a sudden burning sensation in her eye. Resisting the urge to clean it away, she looked around her nervously.

Under the darkness of the night, the numerous shadows vaguely merged together to form a “sea” of duoluozhongs. She could see that the number of duoluozhongs surrounding them both was gradually increasing and a heavy putrid stench now hung in the scorching air around them. She could see that they were not totally surrounded yet, but they did not have much time left.

“We have no choice! Let’s head to that building!” Lin Sanjiu gritted her teeth as she dragged Hu Changzai and ran toward the gray building not far from them. It looked as if there weren’t many duoluozhongs in that building, so she made a decision to just try her luck.

[Since the duoluozhongs have all climbed down from the buildings, it should be safe, right?]

In desperate times, even a small glimmer of hope would grant a person extraordinary strength to fight for their survival. Looking up at the short building, Hu Changzai bore with the intense pain and blood loss and scrambled after Lin Sanjiu. The two of them rushed forward, almost in a frenzy. Lin Sanjiu turned two cards back into two metal rods and handed one of them to Hu Changzai. They swung their weapons and attacked continuously as they made their way forward.

Almost losing sense of their rationality, the two of them who were surrounded by the “sea” of duoluozhongs seemed to be driven only by their primitive survival instincts. They were not guided by

their numbed brains but instead by the pure instinctive movements of their muscles. Just when Lin Sanjiu was about to believe that they would never reach the building, the two of them found themselves right in front of the large door of the building, all covered in blood.

The glass door that confronted them slowly cleared Lin Sanjiu's blurry mind. She wiped off the blood on her face and saw that there was a dusty, almost illegible sign beside the door: Shenghai Municipal Public Security Bureau (Long Hua Subdivision).

Chapter 46: Milady, You Are Really a Heroine

The left panel of the glass door was already damaged. Only half of that panel remained with sharp, jutting edges that glimmered faintly in the darkness. This was the first time in her life that Lin Sanjiu was this happy to see a public security bureau. She quickly pushed open the door with her body and called out to Hu Changzai: “Quick come in!” At the same time, she kicked away a duoluozhong who was rushing at her. Unfortunately, her leg was nicked. Hu Changzai struggled into the main hall, half stumbling, as sharp buzzing noises followed closely behind him.

“Go look for something to block the door, I will hold the fort for the moment,” Lin Sanjiu held her metal rod against her back as she said this, while she stood at the door. Hu Changzai knew that this was not the time for him to thank her. Dragging his injured leg, he rushed into one of the rooms and pulled out a meeting table. To be honest, facing that wave of duoluozhongs that seemed to approach like a tidal wave, Lin Sanjiu could feel her calves throbbing. When she saw that Hu Changzai had returned, she kicked away a duoluozhong heading toward the door before jumping through the half-broken door panel. Then, they blocked off the door with the meeting room table. However, even as they propped the table up, they quickly heard the banging noises as the duoluozhongs banged their mouthparts heavily against it.

“Oh no, this table is not going to hold... let’s go upstairs! Hurry!” Lin Sanjiu urged. Even though there was no way they could escape by going upstairs, that was the only route available to them. Hu Changzai wasted no time hobbling quickly behind her as she ran to the stairway.

Just when they reached the second floor, they heard a loud bang from the first floor; the table had been violently pushed aside.

They both exchanged glances as they felt their chests tightening.

“Let’s hide in one of the room,” Hu Changzai suggested. After bleeding the whole journey, Hu Changzai’s face was now a ghastly white, and he could no longer run any further.

“We might be able to escape by scaling the facade of the building.”

[We’ll have to go with that.] Lin Sanjiu nodded and stepped into the corridor of the second floor. The first room was the pantry which didn’t have a door; the second room was the office of the census registration department, but its door was already destroyed by something unknown, so it was not usable; she looked around and found a third room with a slightly ajar door that was still intact. “Here!” she called over to Hu Changzai ecstatically before rushing over to open the door.

Unbeknownst to her, there were two gargantuan duoluozhongs in the room. They immediately turned their heads at the same time and stared at her when she walked in. For a brief moment, they both froze on the spot.

The two duoluozhongs were human men in their previous incarnation, and both were above 180cm. It was clear that they had absorbed countless people as they had supple skins, well-developed muscles, and mouthparts which looked monstrously strong. Compared to the crowd of duoluozhongs outside, they appeared even more dangerous.

At this distance, if they simply decided to attack with their mouthparts, the two humans would definitely die...

However, after just one second, the two duoluozhongs turned back and stared hard at each other without even bothering to look at Lin Sanjiu and Hu Changzai.

[Huh?]

In a blink of an eye, Lin Sanjiu’s back was already covered in cold

sweat. She composed herself and noticed that both duoluozhongs were glaring at each other with intense malice, with no sign that they would even throw a sideways glance at the two humans. There was an overturned office table between the two duoluozhongs, the scattered files on the floor around them were covered in brown dried blood, and... there was also a sun-gold colored choker on the dirty floor. The choker radiated with a warm glowing light which made it glaringly out of place amidst the desolated, decrepit surroundings. Lin Sanjiu instantly knew what it was the moment she saw it and understood why the two duoluozhongs displayed such odd behaviors. A sudden flash of thought invaded her mind and what she did next shocked Hu Changzai to the core!

“Come in. Close the door,” Lin Sanjiu commanded without turning behind to look at Hu Changzai as she stepped into the room. He was just about to respond with the words “Are you crazy?” when he suddenly realized that the two duoluozhongs remained still. As the room was not large, once she stepped into the room, she found herself only a few steps away from the duoluozhong nearest to the door. Despite that, that particular duoluozhong only tensed up its muscles, its eyes maintained its focus on the other duoluozhong.

“That thing on the floor is a unique ‘special item’ that only appears because of the New World. Both duoluozhongs are trying to grab it, but they are waiting for an opening so they probably couldn’t care about us being here.” Under normal circumstances, Lin Sanjiu wasn’t all that smart. However, during critical situations, she could get exceptionally quick-witted. At that precise moment, she did not try to speak softly; instead, she laughed confidently, “Hi, we just came in to hide. We won’t do anything. Don’t worry! Just go ahead and continue with what you’re doing!”

Even though she phrased her words in such a harmless manner, her body tensed with caution. She gripped her metal rod tightly as she held a grim expression. She pressed her body against the wall

and slowly made her way toward a metal file cabinet. The duoluozhong opposite her, with a tattoo of a tiger climbing down his arm, scoffed coldly but did not move. As Lin Sanjiu looked at its back, she explained neutrally, “I think both of you should have figured by now that we only came in here because we really have no choice. If we don’t hide here, we’ll die outside. Please continue with your confrontation. I totally understand. If any one of you lose focus for just one second, the item might be snatched by the other party. If we get what we want, I promise I will not interfere.”

Witnessing that courage, Hu Changzai almost wanted to call her a heroine and praise her on the spot, but this was not the appropriate situation. When Lin Sanjiu pricked up her ears and listened, she heard the chaotic footsteps which had already reached the corridors and the distinctive gelatinous sound that the duoluozhongs’ sticky, mucous skin made when they walked. The eyebrows of both duoluozhongs in the room bunched up.

“Our enemies are reaching here soon. You wouldn’t want that group of duoluozhongs to just flood in here, right? What should we do now? Since you both are also duoluozhongs, why don’t you just inform them that there is nobody else in here?” she said shrewdly with a rather unreasonable tone. After that, she gestured to Hu Changzai with her chin, “Hey, you should get your leg bandaged.”

She was certain that the two duoluozhongs would not allow that large group to barge into the room. As she expected, just as she said those words, the door was struck by multiple mouthparts from outside the room. This was immediately followed by a sharp reverberating buzz produced, almost at the same time, by both duoluozhongs in the room. They immediately heard a few vague responding calls from out the door. The two duoluozhongs continued buzzing for a few long minutes. When the room was finally silent again, they could no longer hear any noise outside. Apparently, just like posthumans had diverse levels of combative capabilities, duoluozhongs seemed to also be segregated by their

own classes.

“Get out now!” Even though the duoluozhong did not turn to look at them, it sounded a lot more agitated. “Sure, sure! I’ll just wait for my companion to get his leg bandaged, and we will leave...” Lin Sanjiu said as she crouched down to observe Hu Changzai’s wound. Hu Changzai looked at her with some gratitude and said, “I am fine. Let’s just go. We shouldn’t stay here... for too long,” he immediately slowed down his words when he realized that Lin Sanjiu was mouthing some words to him: “Go ahead of me. Go downstairs,” she repeated this a few times before he finally nodded his head, bewildered.

“Okay, your leg is properly bandaged,” she said as she supported Hu Changzai. “Thank you both for your help. We will be leaving now.”

Naturally, the two duoluozhongs did not reply but continued glaring at each other. Lin Sanjiu pursed her lips and forcefully suppressed the nervousness she felt as she was about to walk on a tightrope. Hu Changzai, who was just beside her, noticed the hidden anxiety on her face, and his heart immediately raced with adrenaline.

When she opened the door, there wasn’t a single duoluozhong in the corridor. Lin Sanjiu nudged Hu Changzai forward gently. He instantly understood and rushed downstairs without a moment of hesitation.

“Well, I am just curious.” She turned to look behind her as she felt her palms turn sweaty. “What did you both do just now? Why did all the other duoluozhongs leave so quickly?”

One of the duoluozhong gave her an impatient hiss. Even though it did not move, Lin Sanjiu was not waiting for an answer, she was just waiting for the fraction of a second where they were distracted...

She threw out a card into mid-air. When it was hovering above

the choker, the card flew upward and then fell sharply. Once it came in contact with the card, the choker turned into multiple golden-orange spots of light and integrated into the card. Before the duoluozhongs could react, the card flew back to Lin Sanjiu. With the card in her hand, she immediately ran. She had rehearsed the entire scenario multiple times in her head, but she couldn't believe that she actually managed to get the choker!

Chapter 47: How High Is Your Potential Growth Value Anyway!?

Going downstairs was indeed a wise choice!

Anxiety, excitement, fear... These emotions burned through her entire body like fire. She had never felt so breathless before, and neither had her heart ever race so fast. Her feet had just touched the floor of the main hall, and Lin Sanjiu did not even have the time to decide on the direction to head, when someone pulled her arm forcefully, leading her into a room.

It was the meeting room where they got the table from.

As she just managed to hide herself, two irate figures appeared in the main hall the very next second. They immediately sped out of the main exit like a violent storm—as the meeting room's door was blatantly opened, it simply did not cross their minds to take a look. Lin Sanjiu hid behind the door for some time, not daring to even try to catch her breath. She was relieved when she felt sure that the two duoluozhongs were not coming back. Hu Changzai, who was behind her, finally chided her, "Do you want to die! What sort of treasure is worth taking such a large risk? Huh?"

"I... I have no idea..." Lin Sanjiu took a deep breath and her lips curved upward uncontrollably, revealing a narrow dimple at the side of her face. She did not mention the crucial point to him. The moment she laid eyes on that choker, her Keen Senses rang out to her like wailing police sirens, leaving only a single thought in her mind: she must have it!

She took out a[Razor Blade]card. A simple thought flashed in her mind, and a well-crafted metallic choker fell out from the card. Even though the card was part of Lin Sanjiu's ability, once the card materialized, it was actual, tangible matter. That was the reason it was possible for the Special Item to integrate with her card. Lin Sanjiu quickly caught the choker as the shiny golden orange glow

it emitted lit up half her face, "It's so beautiful!"

She didn't know what metal the choker was made of, it had a bright, smooth luster, and light radiated from it like water ripples. A bold palette was utilized with its geometrical design, with sun gold color as its primary theme, it was contrasted with a delicate bright pink and a dash of aquamarine blue. Despite the brazen color combination, it was extremely beautiful.

Lin Sanjiu admired it for a while in her hands, then she converted it into a card.

[Pygmalion Choker]

Introduction:

The name of this choker is derived from a famous phenomenon in the psychology field: Pygmalion Effect, otherwise known as "expectancy effect". Just as people would display corresponding behaviors, being subconsciously affected by expectations from others, the wearer of the choker would also be influenced by their companions' thoughts.

Instructions:

Fasten the choker after wearing. Note: Don't force it if you have a thick neck. After that, invite your companion to come up with an ability or trait. You will then be able to express the ability or trait described by your companion.

Conditions to Note:

1. Only positive mental constructs will work. For example, "he can fly" is permissible whereas "he will sink in water" will not work.

2. Each mental construct can only be realized once. The ability or trait will last for 5 mins. It requires a 24hr recharge period after each use.

3. After a mental construct has been utilized, the strength of the

exhibited ability is restricted by the wearer's Potential Growth Value. A person who has a Potential Growth Value of only 5, can only elevate about 30cm off the ground even if he could fly. Nobody can use this item to take over the universe. (Please take note the numbers used are only for reference).

4. Once a wearer puts on the choker, it cannot be removed unless the choker is destroyed by brute force. The only other method to retrieve the choker is to chop off the wearer's head. So, please take good care of your own head.

5. There are no limitations on the ways you can obtain companions and get them to provide you with their ideas.

Hint about spawning spots: This choker appears in locations where team battles occur.

As the card provided quite a lot of details, Lin Sanjiu had to swipe upward twice before she could reach the end of the content. Hu Changzai, who stood just beside Lin Sanjiu, tried to look away at first to avoid arousing her suspicion toward him. However, he finally couldn't withstand his itching curiosity, so he secretly took a few glances at her card. After Lin Sanjiu had finished reading the card, she converted it back to the choker. Hu Changzai immediately urged, "Quick! Wear it on and let me help you test it out! I used to love watching superhero films!"

Seeing his uncommon, almost heaven-defying treasure, he assumed that it belonged to Lin Sanjiu without a doubt. Lin Sanjiu smiled at him without feeling the need to reject his assumption out of courtesy. After all, she risked her life to obtain the item. She could not control the excitement she felt, her fingers trembled slightly as she wore the choker.

"Click!" The choker's metal clasp snapped together perfectly. She touched the moderately cold choker which was now around her neck, then she grinned at Hu Changzai, "Okay, what sort of ability will you give me..."

Before she could finish her sentence, there was a loud boom! A strong wind washed over them as they were buffeted by a rain of sawdust. They took a few steps back and turned to look. They discovered that the meeting room's door had been obliterated. Amidst the cloud of sawdust in the air, they could see a large figure... it belonged to one of the previous duoluozhongs.

Compared to the average duoluozhong, it had an extremely hard mouthpart which was at

least one segment longer. With a single attack, the wooden door and even a portion of the wall disappeared, leaving only a large, serrated hole. The duoluozhong's buzzing voice raised the goosebumps on their skins, "Great! I found you first!"

Lin Sanjiu stared at it and went into a fighting position.

"Take that thing off your neck, and I'll grant you a quick death." Unexpectedly, the duoluozhong did not run away in fear even after seeing the choker; instead, it let out a cruel laugh. Lin Sanjiu suddenly thought of a possibility when she remembered what Marcie told her before. When people obtain a special item, they usually try to get hints about its usage from the item itself, just like the Ability Polishing Agent. If there were no hints, one had to try to activate it. Once the item has been used once, the user should be able to figure out its effect. However, for items that looked too dangerous or when the user had no clue on how to activate the item, the owner might not even be able to guess the name of the item... Likewise, she was sure that nobody could guess the crux to using this Pygmalion Choker was actually dependent on one's companion. Thus, it was apparent to her that the duoluozhong in front of them had no idea about the effects of the item.

"Hey, Hu Changzai. Before this New World descended, what was the last superhero movie

that you watched?" Lin Sanjiu asked, unruffled by the situation.

A knowing smile appeared on Hu Changzai's face. He wiped off

the bloodstain and dust on

her spectacles and said, smiling, "Iron man."

"Okay, let's test it out!" Lin Sanjiu beamed showing her dimple.

The duoluozhong had a faint inkling that things were about to get nasty. It swung its mouthpart, getting ready to charge forward. It saw Lin Sanjiu's fist glow with a white light. Suddenly, he felt a blast of air currents like that of a tornado, accompanied by an explosive boom, and the blast hit him.

The duoluozhong did not even have the chance to attack. It disintegrated into fine dust just as with half the building. The remaining half of the building wobbled for a few moments as if it were drunk. Then, a few broken bricks, concrete pieces, and sawdust fell successively...

Hu Changzai sat on the ground, startled by the blast, he looked at the back of the woman in front of him. He only regained his senses after some time, muttering, "How... how high is your Potential Growth Value!?"

Chapter 48: When Septimus Was by himself

They heard a faint sound of an explosion in the far distance and felt the ground shook for a moment following that explosion. Septimus wiped the perspiration from his forehead while he turned to look behind him. In the darkness, all he saw was the vast ruins of the city, disfigured by the intense heat that enveloped around them—Other than that, he did not spot any peculiarities.

After exhausting all their energy, running continuously for ten minutes at their maximum speed, the four members of the squad were now very far from the spot where they were separated from Lin Sanjiu. The number of duoluozhongs chasing behind them had long dwindled to less than half the original sum, and the remaining few were quickly killed off with the joint efforts of Griselda and Gao Fei. Blood and pus spurted, sprayed, and splattered everywhere, creating a literal path of bloodbath behind the few of them... Fortunately, they were out of danger, for now.

Panting heavily, Gao Fei plopped down on the floor, wiping sweat off his face as he commented, “Even though it isn’t right for me to say this... If Luther’s friends didn’t get into trouble then, we might not have escaped so easily.”

Septimus’s face visibly darkened when he heard these words. He gave his face a rough wipe and remained silent with a somber expression. Not far from him, Xu Xiaoyang stood quietly with Griselda, guarding her like a bodyguard.

“I am bad with words, please don’t take it to heart.” Gao Fei felt the inappropriateness of his words when he saw Septimus’s expression, “Even though she is... gone, she was a kind person. Don’t forget this, she sacrificed her life to save others.”

Septimus raised his hands to cover his eyes. After a while, he placed his hands down and pretended as if he was composed, but the corners of his eyes were still red. Gao Fei felt bad when he saw

him acting in that manner. He sighed and said, “You’re both good people. If you didn’t yell for us to run, I would have been dead meat by now...”

When he heard this, Septimus gave a wan smile, “Shouting a sentence is not that big of a deal.”

“If you didn’t take the initiative to stay at the rear of the group with me, who else would even cover my back?” Gao Fei got a little emotional as he spoke and gave Septimus’s shoulder a slap. “I think you should be about the same age as me, right? Why don’t we become sworn brothers when we get back?”

The teenager laughed candidly, and before Septimus could reply, he continued wilfully, “I am 17 this year, my birthday is in July... What about you? You’re younger than me by 2 months? Ha, then you should call me big brother... Don’t worry! I think you should have noticed that my ability is quite useful and practical. If you are in trouble, I’ll definitely help—”

“Stop your jibber-jabber! Are you done resting?” Xu Xiaoyang interrupted him suddenly, “Let’s go!” Before they stopped to rest, Xu Xiaoyang had made it clear that they will have to make a detour before they return to Oasis to inform the executives to send more backup to help eliminate the duoluozhongs. Even though the girl tried her best to sound threatening, her sweet adolescent voice made each word sound much milder, so Gao Fei didn’t mind complying. He dusted himself off and stood up.

“Uhh... all of you can leave first, you don’t have to be bothered with me,” Septimus said suddenly, giving a feeble smile and avoiding Gao Fei’s shocked expression.

“What are you saying? If you stay here alone, you’ll be eaten by duoluozhongs.”

“Even if I tried my best to keep up, I will just slow you down.” Septimus sighed softly and confessed reluctantly, “Actually, I sprained my leg just now. Basically, I can’t even stand up right

now.”

Xu Xiaoyang exchanged a glance with Griselda when she heard what he said. Gao Fei cursed and hauled Septimus up by his arm, “So that was it? You had me thinking that it was something worse! You just hurt your leg, do you have to act like you’re going to prepare to sacrifice yourself? I’ll carry you.”

“That won’t do. If we meet the duoluozhongs again, it will be difficult for you to run...” Septimus protested to no avail as Gao Fei pulled Septimus’s arms over his neck, latched his arm under Septimus’s knees and carried him in a piggyback manner. Luther had a height of over 1.7m, so he fit quite comfortably behind Gao Fei’s 1.9m frame. Gao Fei had extraordinary strength so the weight of Luther’s body was really nothing much to him. He flashed a smile at Xu Xiaoyang and gestured for them to start moving, “Let’s go!”

“Busybody,” Griselda muttered under her breath as she crouched down for Xu Xiaoyang to jump on her back. With that, the four of them started moving again. Even though Griselda brought a map with her, it did not show the area beyond Long Hua Road. To make sense of their direction, they had to stop now and then to look around. There were even instances where they had to turn back when they found out that they were heading in the wrong direction. After they defended themselves against a few surprise attacks, the factory compound finally came into view in the distance. Just then, Gao Fei realized that the arms around his neck started to shiver.

“Luther, what’s wrong?” he asked a little worriedly.

Septimus replied in a weak voice, “I think... I think I have a fever. I feel very, very cold....”

“Huh? Are you sure? Let me check!” Gao Fei quickly stopped, shocked by Septimus’s reply. At the same time, Xu Xiaoyang also turned to look behind...

Everything happened in a split second, it was so fast that no one could even react in time. Gao Fei's neck was suddenly torn open as arterial blood sprayed in all directions, creating a shower of blood. With his throat severed, blood gushed continuously into his trachea. Gao Fei could not say a single word, he struggled and only manage to make a few gurgling sounds. His bloodshot eyes burned with fury, and as he stood tottering near the brink of death, he tried his best to reach for his back...

Septimus slid down from Gao Fei's back nimbly, holding a blood-covered knife. He stared expressionlessly at Gao Fei who was withering in pain, then he lifted his leg and delivered a kick to the back of Gao Fei's knee.

"Bam!" Just like that, the tall figure fell to the ground, stirring up a cloud of dust. Blood poured out from Gao Fei's neck, and soon he stopped moving. Under the silent night sky, the cloud of yellow sand dust obstructed the view of the bloody, gruesome aftermath. As the sand settled again, it revealed Septimus's serene expression—on Luther's face.

Xu Xiaoyang was totally stunned. She gripped Griselda's clothes tightly as she turned pale. It took a while before she could react properly to what had happened. "Why... did you kill him?" she only realized how dry her throat was after she spoke.

"Huh, you're asking me?" Septimus scratched his face with some annoyance, "I thought you would've figured out once you see this." He paused for a moment, then his eyes gleamed with a hint of humor. "Even though I don't know the reason, there can only be three survivors in our squad, right? Team Leader, it is the three of us here, no?"

Xu Xiaoyang furrowed her brows. She did not question how he knew that information, but instead asked, "What if your friends are not dead?"

"If that was the case, I'll just kill them both. I'm sure it'll be

easier than dealing with Griselda.” Septimus took two steps to the left, carefully avoiding the blood that was still spilling out from Gao Fei’s corpse. The atmosphere had frozen for a moment before Xu Xiaoyang commanded curtly for Griselda to continue walking. After that, she turned to look back at Septimus, “You better watch out...” Turning back to the front, not intending to give Septimus another gaze, she said, “Don’t talk to me when we’re back at Oasis. I don’t like you.”

Chapter 49: Marcie's Crisis

Thirty minutes before, when Lin Sanjiu was trying to carve out a bloody path through the sea of duoluozhongs and when Septimus was still running for his life with the others, Marcie sat in the infirmary. She packed up the first aid equipment and placed them back into the refrigerator.

[This infirmary is most likely the last place in Oasis—perhaps even in the entire Shenghai Municipal— with a working refrigerator,] Marcie thought to herself feeling somewhat impressed. Under such high temperatures, syringes would melt, drugs would lose their potency and stability, and rubbing alcohol may even explode. The only way to properly store these medical supplies now was to keep them in a refrigerator. She recalled the first-aid box she had found in a small pharmacy. To think that she had nearly tried to use those moldy bandages in the first-aid box on Luther's open wounds previously! She was really too anxious at that time, thankfully Hei Zeji gave them his medicine.

“Hey, you're still here?”

While she was engrossed in her thoughts, the infirmary door opened without warning, and someone popped his head in.

“Oh, Executive Chen. I am just about to leave.” Marcie smiled and closed the refrigerator door.

Chen Jinfeng walked in, sat down in a chair by the examination table and remarked, “I met Tie Dao in the corridor just now. What you did with the bandaging looked professional! What was your job before?”

“I worked in a laboratory,” she replied briefly not expecting that it would pique Chen Jinfeng's interest even more.

“Oh? What's your research field?”

“Life Sciences,” Marcie said curtly, “Executive Chen, you can

continue sitting here, I am leaving first—“

Before she could finish her sentence, Chen Jinfeng suddenly grabbed her wrist when she walked past him. He smiled at her, “You don’t have to leave in a hurry... I still have something to say to you.”

Marcie pulled back her hand quickly and looked at him. After he had paused for a moment, Chen Jinfeng acted indifferently to her reaction and continued, “Come, sit down... sigh. Let me tell you something. In Oasis, we don’t have a lack of talented people in different fields. The only thing is that we don’t have a doctor. We have a nurse who works in the infirmary. She can tend to superficial injuries and common illnesses, but she is unable to handle anything more. Since you were a life sciences researcher, I presume you are also knowledgeable in medical science?”

“Do you mean that you want me to work as a physician here?” Marcie asked, feeling a bit awkward as she sat down opposite from him.

Chen Jinfeng clapped his hands together and smiled, “That’s right! Are you willing to do that? It is a meaningful job to help and save people!”

“It’s possible... When there are no missions, I am sure I can come over here to help,” Marcie said as she considered his proposition, she wanted to continue, but she suddenly felt something on her hand—she looked down and realized that Chen Jinfeng was stroking the back of her hand with his short stubby fingers. Marcie stood up immediately and glared at him in shock and anger. She was rendered speechless momentarily.

Chen Jinfeng was not one bit surprised by her reaction, he also stood up from his seat. Even though he was burly, he was shorter than Marcie by a head. He ogled at Marcie’s figure without any restraint, then he laughed, “I spent all my efforts on managing Oasis, helping so many people. But I feel very lonely... When I first

saw you, I felt that you were different from everyone,” as he said this, he walked over to the door.

“Click.” The door was locked.

“What the hell are you doing!” Marcie panicked a little and quickly scanned her surroundings for something she could use to defend herself.

“Don’t be scared. I just want to talk to you,” as he said this, he walked over and sat on a small bed in the infirmary. He looked at Marcie and gave her an unsavory smile, “There are not many humans left in Oasis or rather the entire world. For human civilization to recover, it is not enough to rely on just the survivors. We must think about the next generation. So, the next step in my plan is to appeal to everyone to liberate themselves from the conventional taboos between men and women...” He patted the bed, signaling for Marcie to sit down beside him.

Without giving him a single glance, Marcie raced to the door like the wind. She reached for the lock and twisted it open easily. However, when she tried to open the door, it didn’t budge no matter how hard she pushed.

[Could this be his ability?]

Just as Marcie alternated between fear and anger, she heard Chen Jinfeng’s wet, obnoxious voice behind her: “Don’t you want to play your part in reviving human civilization? I heard that the more diverse parental genes are, the more intelligent their offspring will be...”

“Get away from me!” Marcie could not stand it any longer. She delivered a kick in Chen Jinfeng’s direction. Despite his short and bulky stature, Chen Jinfeng was surprisingly agile, so he dodged the attack easily.

“Don’t waste your energy. Once I activate my ability, this infirmary is my territory. There is no way you can leave without

my permission, and no way anyone can come in..." He laughed as he threw his weight onto Marcie. Marcie buckled under the force and fell backward. Following which, Chen Jinfeng pushed her down and pressed his body against hers. He seemed to fully enjoy the woman's resistance and the feeling of her struggling beneath him, he grasped both of Marcie's arm with his hands. Without taking any other action, he sat on her and watched with narrowed eyes. "Wow, Caucasian women are really different... look at that buxom body..." He chuckled before violently thrusting his fist into Marcie's stomach. Her body instantly curled like a shrimp. She was in so much pain that she could not even utter a word. Logically speaking, they both had enhanced bodies, so Marcie should be able to put up some resistance. However, she was now in Chen Jinfeng's lair.

Chen Jinfeng grabbed her roughly, without any hesitation, groping her incessantly, "Oh, it's so soft... Huh?" The firm roundness in his hands suddenly felt very strange—his hands were full one instance and empty the next. It was as if the woman's body could evade him! Perplexed, he opened his eyes wide and stared. Under him, Marcie's body flickered like a poor television image caused by bad reception. She disappeared for a second then appeared again with a sound of a snap the very next second. When she disappeared, Chen Jinfeng's hands immediately hit the ground.

At some point, she stopped struggling and confronted him with her blurry, pixelated face like that of a digital image. She asked him accusingly, "Didn't you say that Long Hua Road was just 20 minutes away?"

Chen Jinfeng leaped up in shock, still staring at Marcie's flickering body as he muttered, "What... what's wrong with you..."

The person in front of him, whom now had almost an illusory quality and whose colors were fast fading, stood up and yelled, "Answer me!"

The circumstances changed, and Chen Jinfeng was now trying to get away from Marcie. “Who knows what they’re up to!” he retorted, a little anxiously. Feeling a sudden itch at the back of his neck, he touched the spot and realized that he had somehow received a small scratch wound. In an inexplicable manner, that small wound spurred him to reveal his hostility openly: “Consider yourself lucky today! Let me tell you the truth, those two friends of yours will never come back! If I want to get you, I still have plenty of chances in the future!” he warned menacingly.

Once he ended his sentence, there was a “snap” sound. This time, Marcie disappeared without a trace completely. Chen Jinfeng waited for a few seconds, but there was still nobody else in the room besides himself. Since he could not make sense of the situation, he quickly deactivated his ability and left the room hurriedly. Eight minutes after that occurred, Gao Fei carried Septimus on his back as the group of people started heading back to Oasis.

Chapter 50: Sorry, I Destroyed Those Buildings

“What is with these tremors?” a man in a singlet, with a face full of sweat, asked. “It had been shaking for a while since just now... as if there is an earthquake. Then, the sounds of explosions...”

“Yeah. It is weird that the tremors come one after another, inconsistently...” the man sitting opposite him grumbled. Changing the subject, he said, “It is too boring to just sit here and watch the door day after day. I wonder when we can go outside and patrol the perimeter.”

One of the other men sitting at the door immediately laughed, “I bet you just want to go out to look for some cigarettes! I know you —“

Before he finished his sentence, a man who appeared to be their leader interrupted, “There are people approaching. Stay alert!”

The guards stood up noisily and cast their gaze outward. The lights at the entrance of Oasis radiated out like a fan shape, from bright to dark. Within the area where the darkness crept into the light like ink on paper, there were indeed a few silhouettes. The first person they saw was a long-haired woman. She was covered in blood and grime and looked rather unpresentable. She was also carrying a young girl on her back. It was Griselda. Xu Xiaoyang straightened her back and waved toward the people at the entrance.

“They are from the previous small squad. Check the number of people first!” the leader yelled out.

“We have already confirmed that. There are three people. That is the quota for this group!”

Seeing that Griselda and Septimus were getting close, the leader gave a gesture and commanded, “Okay. Open the door!”

The metal door slowly opened just when Griselda reached the door. As Xu Xiaoyang did not fight during the whole journey, she was still very clean. Right then, she called out to the guards at the door, "Quick! Inform the Executives to come over! A large group of duoluozhongs may be coming toward here from Long Hua Road!"

The guards were startled when they heard this, and they quickly turned to their leader. Their leader hesitated for a few seconds, but before he could speak, a gush of sand hit his face, and he looked up promptly. At some unknown point in time, an imposing whirlwind of sand was formed, and it now headed toward the entrance of Oasis. Even though it was still some distance away, the combination of strong wind and sand hit them in just mere seconds. The sand lashed at them, scratching their skins, and making it difficult for them to even open their eyes.

Within a blink of an eye, the whirlwind was right in front of them. Xu Xiaoyang and the others noticed this abnormality, so they rushed through the doors quickly. However, they were not fast enough. They had just stepped into the compound when the impact of the wind struck them, causing them to fall to the ground. While they tried to get up and were about to witness the whirlwind destroy their metal door, it stopped in front of the door as if it had a mind of its own.

The howling wind grazed the metal door as the guards and the others stared bewilderedly at the whirlwind. Gradually, sand fell from mid-air as if the whirlwind had lost its core structure, revealing the two people right in the middle. When they saw the two people clearly, Xu Xiaoyang's group of three gasped. She exclaimed, "They're still alive?"

The two people who walked out from the dust devil were indeed Lin Sanjiu and Hu Changzai. The corner of Septimus's eyes twitched for a second. Among the three of them, he knew the most about Lin Sanjiu's ability. Before this, he already looked down on her ability. He felt that Lin Sanjiu could survive till today only

because of her Keen Senses and her athleticism. That was the reason why he was confident that she would not make it back when the two of them were surrounded by duoluozhongs. [Does she have the ability to control sandstorms now? Did she just develop a new ability?]

“Ptui... Augh! Ptui! Ptui!”

Just when everyone was still eyeing them in astonishment, Lin Sanjiu’s behavior stood out. Like a cat with an aversion to water, she started spitting profusely while dusting sand off her face, “Hu Changzai, what kind of rotten idea is this? There is sand in my eyes, mouth, and ears!”

“In the movie, the energy repulsors don’t stir up this much sand...” Hu Changzai’s condition was not much better than Lin Sanjiu. The lens of his spectacles was covered entirely by sand.

Even though Iron Man could fly, the Pygmalion Choker could only fulfill one ability. Consequently, in order to move quickly and eliminate as many duoluozhongs as they could, Lin Sanjiu tried to manipulate the air around them to create a forward thrusting air current. But they didn’t expect the horrible side effects...

“Isn’t that obvious! Anyway, is the five minutes up? Huh? Team Leader? Septimus?” Lin Sanjiu lifted her head, unaware of what had happened. “Why are you here? Wait... isn’t this Oasis? We are back at Oasis?”

The ground of people at the entrance stared at them, dumbfounded. Xu Xiaoyang finally spoke, “What happened to you? How did you survive?”

Lin Sanjiu, who was covered from top to bottom with sand, just like a terracotta soldier, chuckled at her words, “I think I may have overdone it a little. I destroyed a majority of the buildings from Oasis to Long Hua Road... You don’t have to worry about the duoluozhongs. Most of them are either dead or have fled. There are not many left.”

Almost as if to prove her words, a tall building in the distance crumbled to the ground. The crowd was stunned. Septimus was the first one to react. He gave Lin Sanjiu an evil eye and said, "Please give us a warning before you do such a thing next time!" Then, he sighed as if he was relieved. This drew glares from Xu Xiaoyang and Griselda. Lin Sanjiu continued chuckling as she pulled Hu Changzai toward the door.

"Sir, the number of survivors exceeded the quota... What should we do?" One of the guards whispered to their leader anxiously. "They are coming in soon. Should we stop them?"

"What nonsense! Look behind!" their leader chided as if he was speaking to a group of idiots.

The man turned to look and realized that the open space in the factory compound was now filled with a large group of people, pointing their fingers and stretching their necks, trying to find out what had just happened. Xu Xiaoyang's warning had created quite a commotion. That was made worse when everyone saw that horrifying dust devil heading their way. Even though Lin Sanjiu already stopped its advancement, the building by the entrance was already dyed yellow by the sand.

"Besides... Do you have the confidence to defeat that woman? Bring an Executive over right now!" the leader instructed quietly. "We are not going to take the blame for this."

Enlightened, the man replied, "Oh, I will go right now."

Their conversation was overheard by Xu Xiaoyang and the others. Xu Xiaoyang called out angrily, "Uncle Chen!" At the same time, the guards turned and found Chen Jinfeng standing behind them, with a grim expression.

Chapter 51: Do You Want to Work With Me?

Starting from Lin Sanjiu, the members of Xu Xiaoyang's squad were hailed as heroes. As they made their way to the building where Chen Jinfeng's office was, the crowd cheered. In front of the public, Chen Jinfeng commended them, smiling splendidly. But the moment he turned his head to lead the way, the smile instantly slipped off his face, leaving a sullen expression. Ever since he became an Executive, this was the first time he felt so uncertain about the situation before him.

It wasn't a difficult thing to have them "killed in action" because even if they survived this mission, he still had other chances to do them in. His primary concern was that they might stir up trouble when they regrouped with Marcie. In the past, he would have full confidence in himself to resolve the issue and keep it under wraps. However, he did not anticipate Lin Sanjiu displaying such a powerful ability. That was the cause of his apprehension.

He could only blame this on the inaccuracy of the information he was given! That person told him about the woman's card ability, her companion's Shapeshifting ability, and even some of their stats, but nothing pointed to them having any practical fighting abilities...

"Executive Chen, do you know where is Marcie?" Just then, he heard Lin Sanjiu's voice from behind him. Chen Jinfeng was startled for a moment, but after some quick thinking, he replied mildly, "I'm also looking for her. If you do see her, please tell her to look for me. I would like her to work at the infirmary."

"Oh," Lin Sanjiu answered curtly, sounding somewhat doubtful, but she did not say anything else.

As they walked along the dimly-lit corridor, a surreptitious smile suddenly crept across Septimus's face. They soon reached Chen Jinfeng's office.

After Chen Jinfeng said a few poignant words in remembrance of Gao Fei, he ordered one of his men to bring in a few boxes full of supplies as a reward for the team. When Lin Sanjiu looked at the contents, she discovered that there was a good mix of useful items in the box: aside from the many packets of undamaged vacuum-packed food, there were also quite a few daily necessities and other paraphernalia like pens, torchlights, batteries, etc.

As Lin Sanjiu lacked neither food nor daily necessities, she searched the boxes casually and was surprised when she found a tube of cockroach gel bait at the bottom of one of the boxes. Along with humans, cockroaches also managed to survive the high temperatures of Hyperthermal Hell. Albeit not because they evolved, but purely due to their natural body structure, but that was also the reason that their population fell sharply.

Lin Sanjiu considered for a second, then she took the gel bait, smiling, “I just happen to need this in my room. You all can distribute the other items among yourselves. I will just take this.” She thought that she had already shown enough consideration for the others with her actions. However, she did not expect that Xu Xiaoyang would just sit there without even taking one look at the boxes. Following suit, Griselda also did nothing. Subsequently, Septimus took only two torchlights. Left with almost the whole lock, stock, and barrel, Hu Changzai found himself a little flummoxed.

Seeing that all the items have been distributed, Chen Jinfeng beamed as he said a short, superficial speech. The heat had led to a meltdown of all world governments, yet had no impact on Chen Jinfeng bureaucratic buffoonery. While he spoke, Lin Sanjiu took the opportunity to call out her Diary Card by covering her mouth and pretending to sneeze.

Perhaps she was lucky, so her Diary Card appeared “obediently” when it was summoned. Once she had the card in her palms, she held it tightly. She untwisted the cap off the tube of cockroach gel

bait and squeezed a little gel at the back of the Diary Card. A few words instantly appeared on the card: “12.58 am. Location: Chen Jinfeng’s office. Lin Sanjiu squeezed a splotch of disgusting cockroach gel bait at the back of this card.”

Lin Sanjiu paid no attention to the implicit protest. Her “Planar World” ability sometimes displayed human-like characteristics, which she had never observed in others’ abilities, but she was already accustomed to it. When Chen Jinfeng paused to take a sip of water, she walked over to his desk in a nonchalant manner and smiled placidly, “Executive Chen, I just want to thank you for all the assistance you have given us recently...”

While she said this, she stealthily pasted the card on the underside of the table. Chen Jinfeng laughed as he looked back at her unsuspectingly and said, “This is all within my duty.” Lin Sanjiu nodded before she turned and noticed Septimus’s gaze.

“Did you see that?” she whispered as she walked past Septimus, “Luckily, it was only you and not the others. I want to see what this Chen Jinfeng is hiding.”

Septimus nodded back at her. It was time for them to leave anyway, so he just said, “Let’s go.” The two of them walked toward the door, Lin Sanjiu took one final look at Chen Jinfeng’s table before she closed the door behind her. The small 10m² office was finally quiet again. Chen Jinfeng mulled silently in his seat for some time, but he could not assuage his restlessness. Maybe it was because he was still angry, maybe it was because he was disturbed by Marcie’s disappearance, or maybe it was due to the failure of the squad’s mission... In any case, this was the first time he felt so uneasy.

At that exact moment, there was a “thump” on the door as if something or someone had knocked on the door. With his enhanced hearing, Chen Jinfeng was certain that no one walked past his office door. After a few seconds, he stood up and opened the door. Just as he expected, there was no one at his door. There

was only a rock. He looked around and found a familiar figure standing at the far end of the corridor.

“Why are you here?” Chen Jinfeng asked as he walked toward that person. “Why are you looking for me?”

[One meter, two meters, three meters... That should be fine.] That person smiled and said, “I want to ask you a question. What did you do to Marcie?”

The room was 4m by 2.5m, that was 10m². The Diary Card had an effective range within the radius of 5m, that would be approximately 25m². If that was the case, their conversation would not be recorded. The person was clear about this because that was what Lin Sanjiu told him personally.

“What are you saying—”

“Don’t waste your breath,” Septimus interjected. “We never told you that Marcie studied medicine. After we left, you must have met her, right? Then, you did something to her, and she disappeared.” The man reacted with a pursed lip and an overcast expression. Once he saw that, Septimus smiled satisfactorily, knowing that he made a right guess. “Don’t worry. I am not here to confront or condemn you... I know the reason for Marcie’s disappearance. I am more than aware about that. I also know that you wished for Lin Sanjiu and me to die in today’s mission, right?” He continued smiling. “But you won’t be satisfied by just killing me now. Don’t you find that woman, Lin Sanjiu, a hindrance? I wish that she would disappear as soon as possible too. So, do you want to work with me?”

Chen Jinfeng widened his eyes in shock. Seeing that, Septimus said softly, “Besides, let me give you the assurance that Marcie won’t appear during this time to interfere with your plans.”

Chapter 52: Hu Changzai Identifies a Problem With Her Companion

Using the water that Fang Dan brought to her, Lin Sanjiu managed to wash off the sand on her body. There was so much sand that the pile on the ground now covered her feet entirely. When her skin was finally moist and clean again, Fang Dan, who had been helping her fetch water, exclaimed in surprise seeing the choker on Lin Sanjiu's neck, "Oh, when did you wear that? It's beautiful."

After she had washed the sand off her Pygmalion Choker, it looked even more resplendent than before. Now Lin Sanjiu knew why no one commented about her choker before this. Previously, she was covered in sweat, so her entire body was encased in sand. Almost no one could tell the color of her hair let alone the choker on her neck. After she bathed and wore a fresh set of clothes, Lin Sanjiu let down her hair and tried to use it to cover her choker awkwardly.

Moments before, Fang Dan had mentioned to her that Hu Changzai was receiving treatment in the infirmary. From what Chen Jinfeng had said, it was possible that Marcie could be there as well... With that in mind, Lin Sanjiu pushed open the door to the infirmary. When she entered the room, a young man with a well-bandaged leg was lying in the small bed of the room. "Are you the only one here?"

"Do you have to sound so disappointed?" Hu Changzai sat up and wore his spectacles, feeling a little peeved. "Are you looking for the nurse? She just went out."

"No, I'm looking for Marcie. It's so weird, I just can't find her anywhere," Lin Sanjiu replied as she searched around the room. She quickly found a roll of bandages in a cabinet and asked, "How's your wound?"

“It doesn’t hurt so much now. Oasis is quite big so it isn’t unusual that you can’t find her.” Hu Changzai answered casually. “Oh, I want to tell you another thing...” He suddenly paused mid-way in his sentence when he looked up.

Lin Sanjiu’s jet-black hair flowed over her shoulders like water, her pair of amber cat-like eyes shone brightly. She actually had a very feminine appearance—but when he saw the snow white bandage around her neck, it suddenly gave her a cool, intense vibe. Even though she did not possess a conventional beauty, she did have her own... charismatic allure.

“Hey, if I do this, you can’t see my choker, right?” Lin Sanjiu patted the bandage on her neck. “Why are you looking at me like that? What do you want to say?”

“Uh, uh, well!” Hu Changzai tried to calm down his thumping heart as he said slightly flustered, “Actually, my ‘Lie Detection’ ability went up one level...”

Lin Sanjiu eyes glowed, and just as she was about to congratulate him, she suddenly heard a voice saying: “So you’re here! Xiao Jiu!” The door swung open revealing Septimus’s face. He was just about to say more when he realized that Hu Changzai was also in the room, so he immediately withdrew the words he wanted to say.

Without suspecting anything, Lin Sanjiu smiled and asked, “What’s up?”

Septimus held his expression for a second as the necessity to speak honestly weighed on him like a rock. He thought for a while, then he smiled, “It’s almost morning, so let’s go for breakfast together later.”

Hu Changzai grabbed a glass of water and swallowed his medicine, indifferently.

It was obvious that such mundane words will not raise any alarm.

“Okay. Oh, do you know where Marcie is?”

Septimus’s heart skipped a beat. He certainly knew where Marcie was. When he was running for his life, he strayed too far from Marcie... If Marcie disappeared because she was too far from Luther, then obviously, Luther had to activate his Persona Separation ability again before Marcie will reappear. Septimus was fully aware of this, but he wished that he could just forget that fact at that very moment.

That was because excuses like: “I don’t know.”, “Maybe, someone called her away to do something.”, or even “Perhaps, she will just pop up later.” would definitely be judged as a lie. It meant that he had to either skip the question or just tell the truth! Hu Changzai finished the water in his glass with one gulp and also started to look at Septimus.

Before he figured out the Lin Sanjiu’s new ability, he knew that he had to avoid Lin Sanjiu’s suspicion. Septimus quickly scanned Lin Sanjiu and immediately exclaimed in an anxious manner, “Was your neck injured?”

“Ah, that, actually...”

Septimus managed to successfully distract Lin Sanjiu. Before she could explain, Septimus sighed and interrupted her, “How could you be so careless? Alright, you should rest first. Don’t bother yourself with anything else. I will call you when it’s time for breakfast.” He did not want to waste time showing concern for that woman now, he knew it was critical for him to leave as soon as possible. “Anything else” would mean looking for Marcie to Lin Sanjiu. Whereas, it would not be considered a lie from Hu Changzai’s perspective. Septimus hid his relief and celebrated his quick thinking inwardly as he quickly left the infirmary.

“He lied to you.”

“Huh?” Lin Sanjiu was stunned, “What do you mean?”

“I don’t mean the conversation just now.” Hu Changzai explained as he gave his head a scratch, “After my ‘Lie Detection’ leveled up, it has two new attributes. Now, I can tell if someone had lied to another person and the identity of the person being lied to in the past 24 hours. So...”

Now, Lin Sanjiu understood his words, but it was difficult for her to accept this. She crossed his arms and thought for a long time before she mumbled, “He avoided my question about Marcie, just now. That’s a little odd. Could it be that he lied to me about this? But that doesn’t make sense. We didn’t even talk much since we came back...”

[Could he have lied even before the mission? Or during the mission? But Marcie was us before the mission so we wouldn’t have discussed about her. When did he lie to me?] Lin Sanjiu was feeling increasingly perplexed by the matter. She just could not wrap her head around it.

After Hu Changzai got those words off his chest, his mood lightened significantly. Not caring that Lin Sanjiu was now confounded, he planted his head back on the bed, “You can take your time to think slowly. This patient needs to rest now.” He was indeed feeling very tired after being tortured by his injured leg and dragging it around for such a long time.

Preoccupied, Lin Sanjiu replied, “Okay, you should rest first. I need to go to Chen Jinfeng’s office to get something...” Since Septimus knew where she had hidden her Diary Card, she was a little bugged by that. Anyway, it had already been two hours or so since she planted her card there.

“Be careful. Since I am not around with you, I can’t help you discern the truth,” Hu Changzai advised before he closed his eyes comfortably. Unexpectedly, Lin Sanjiu froze for a moment and suddenly gripped Hu Changzai’s arm tightly, “Hey, I have a question. Can you tell if someone is lying without using your ability?”

Her question was quite confusing and really came out from nowhere. As he looked into her pair of amber eyes at close proximity, he stammered, “Of course... not. I can only discern whether a person is telling the truth because I’m using my ability... what do you mean...”

At that instant, Lin Sanjiu realized what Septimus’s lie was. She thought for some time while Hu Changzai skin grew very hot. “Hey... You are too close. A girl like you shouldn’t—”

She gave his arm a heavy slap and shouted, “Thank you!” before she shot out of the door.

Chapter 53: Baffled

During the mission, Septimus told her that he could not use any of Luther's ability. Lin Sanjiu moved so fast that she was just like a fleeting shadow, but her footsteps were silent. Chen Jinfeng's office was just ahead, his office door was shut, and light filtered through the gaps around the door frame. She halted and walked slowly to the door. As thoughts ran through her mind, Lin Sanjiu held her breath as she tried to hear for any movements behind the door.

[Luther had two abilities. Persona Separation and Shapeshifting. If Septimus could not shapeshift, logically, he would not be able to use Persona Separation. If so, as a product of Luther's Persona Separation, Marcie should also disappear...]

She did not hear a single sound from behind the door, so she concluded that there was no one in the room.

[...However, before we left, Marcie was still her usual self and only disappeared after we returned. That meant that Septimus has been maintaining Luther's ability. Not only did Marcie know this, but she just took it as a given, so she simply didn't bring this up to me. That's right! Septimus lie must be that!]

Lin Sanjiu turned the doorknob carefully and found it unlocked. She celebrated her luck and scanned around her before she slipped into the office and closed the door behind her. After she entered the room, she crept to the table and reached out to check—her Diary Card was still there. She took it and saw the last line on the card: “3.05 am. The defiled and humiliated Diary Card was retrieved.”

“I don't have time to hear your complaints.” Lin Sanjiu rolled her eyes and quickly wiped away the gel bait without reading the rest of the content on the card. Since the door was not locked, Chen Jinfeng might not be far and could return at any time. The card

disappeared into her palm, and she left the office without delay.

Their dorm in basement one was already filled with sounds of few conversations which belonged to the people who had finished work and were resting. As there were only a handful of people, their voices echoed hollowly through the basement, making the place sound rather empty. Lin Sanjiu beelined to her own cubicle and called out her Diary Card.

In the past two hours, her Diary Card had recorded a total of ten pages of content due to Chen Jinfeng's penchant for saying bullsh*t. The card named the people whom Lin Sanjiu knew and gave labels like ABC to the people she did not. Even after reading the card for a while, she found nothing suspicious except for the first 15 mins when Chen Jinfeng left the room. After that, the conversations were just trivialities like Man A discussing some random administration matters or Woman A asking him about the breakfast menu...

But Lin Sanjiu's eyelid twitched when she reached the sixth page. She was speechless because it recorded the conversation between Chen Jinfeng and Woman C. Even though it was a conversation, there was barely any content. Lin Sanjiu braced herself and scrolled through the countless lines of "Uhh... Uhh... Ahhh... Ahhh..." before she was finally stunned.

Chen Jinfeng: "You're still better... Today, I searched for a foreigner because I just wanted to try her out. But she got away. F*ck! She doesn't know her place! And I don't know where she went!"

Woman C: "Hey... you baddie. How could you look at other women when you already have me..."

[That son of a b*tch actually laid his hands on Marcie!] Lin Sanjiu's face darkened. If the Diary Card were just a normal piece of paper, she would have torn it up. Suppressing her anger, she quickly read through the page, but Chen Jinfeng did not talk about

Marcie after that. She was on the last page, but she still found nothing of interest. Even though Lin Sanjiu didn't know what she was expecting to find, she could not help feeling a little disappointed. "Huh?" she suddenly muttered, as her gaze hovered over the following words: 2.48 am. Tian Minbo (Voley) arrived at the door of office 306 and knocked.

Voley was in Oasis! The figure she saw at their dorm was really him! She contained her shock and continued reading.

Chen Jin Feng: "I was trying to f*cking find you! What's wrong with your info?"

Tian Minbo: "There is nothing wrong with my info. There must be some misunderstanding."

Chen Jin Feng: "Misunderstanding? Then, how do you explain Lin Sanjiu's display of power?"

Tian Minbo: "I think she found a good item. Executive Chen, this is good news! If they die, you will get both the Pocket Dimension Escape Portal[1] and that item to create sandstorms..."

Chen Jinfeng: "Grunt. Voley, I am already at my limits. Because you were afraid that they would find you, I even sent Hu Changzai out on a mission. Just because he is acquainted with them and have seen you before. You should start being useful!"

Tian Minbo: "Just tell me what you need."

Chen Jinfeng: "I am going out now. We'll discuss this on the way."

2.50 am. Both people left the room and left the recording range.

"Why did Chen Jinfeng choose that time to leave!" Lin Sanjiu cursed with gritted teeth and kept the Diary Card. Her brows furrowed as she thought hard about what she had just read, yet she could not get any logical conclusion.

"Damn it! I am not going to think about it! I will just wallop

Voley and Septimus, then we'll see if they talk!" she got down from her bed moodily. If she couldn't make sense of it, she'd just follow her intuition!

Just as she lifted the curtain to go out, she nearly collided with another person. She was stunned when she looked up. The person in front of her had a head of fluffy red hair and faint freckles on fair skin—isn't that Marcie?

"Xiao Jiu, you're hurt?" Marcie was just like before, she had the same tone and mannerism, "Cough. Septimus ran too far from me, so I disappeared as I was not within the effective range of his ability. I only regained my corporeal form after you both came back. You must have been worried..."

Lin Sanjiu's Keen Sense gave her a sudden jolt, and Lin Sanjiu stared back at Marcie suspiciously. She was about to speak when she suddenly spotted someone approaching them, it was Septimus. From what it seems, they came to look for her together. Now Lin Sanjiu was totally baffled. [If Septimus transformed into Marcie to deceive me, who is acting as Septimus? Could it be that Marcie really came back?] She looked at Marcie as she tried to test her, hesitatingly, "When we were away, did anything happen?"

She only read about this matter from her Diary Card a few minutes ago, so no one else should know except for Marcie, herself...

Marcie's expression changed instantly, and she gave an angry harrumph. "Something did happen... but I am okay. That bast*rd, Chen Jinfeng, will definitely have to pay for what he did sooner or later!"

A sense of relief washed over Lin Sanjiu as Macie's answer matched her expectations. She gave a long sigh before giving Marcie a hug, "I thought you'd never come back!" Marcie laughed and hugged her back. Lin Sanjiu eyed Septimus, who was just nearby, then she whispered, "Umm. Can Septimus use Luther's

ability?” Now that Marcie was here, she wanted to confirm her conjecture.

“Of course not.” Lin Sanjiu heard a gentle female voice at the side of her ear.

Translator’s note: [1] The Chinese translation specified that it was a mirror, but it might be a little hard to understand in the context. This is probably the item that was taken from Hei Zeji.

Chapter 54: My Ability Turned Weird After a Level Up

Lin Sanjiu really felt relieved when she finally saw Marcie. As for her doubts and questions, she decided that she could slowly investigate about them later. The next item on her to-do list was to hunt for Voley. Since she spotted him at Basement One, that basically meant that he was living in the same building. If she searched cubicles one by one, there was no way she wouldn't find him.

The surprising thing was that Lin Sanjiu didn't even catch a glimpse of Voley for consecutively three days. For the past three days, she waited till everyone was asleep before searching the cubicles. She already checked every cubicle in Basement One, but she couldn't find him. Just to play safe, she also searched the cubicles in Basement Two, but it was futile.

[Is it possible that he's not in this building? If so, it'll be troublesome.] Lin Sanjiu thought to herself. Recently, Xiao Yu somehow became much stricter about sleeping times. Perhaps because she had been triggered by something, she now sits in a chair at the stairway every morning as if she was deeply afraid that someone would just go out during daytime. After four uneventful days of fruitless searching, Lin Sanjiu laid on her bed. She was starting to get impatient about the matter.

For the past few days, her Keen Senses had constantly been wailing like a police siren in the far corner of her mind, making her feel very uneasy. She had the nagging feeling that something was wrong. During the night, she could temporarily ignore the underlying anxiety as she went around Oasis helping others with their chores; however, once she laid on her bed, it was a different story.

Lin Sanjiu closed her eyes and took a deep breath then slowly

exhaled. After she had done this a couple of times, she managed to just focus on her own breathing. All her distracting thoughts melted like snow in summer and faded back into the recesses of her mind. Her mindscape was just a dark navy, she could see nothing there. It reminded her of the silent deep sea where thousands of mysterious creatures hid. Lin Sanjiu found herself in a very strange state of mind: it was as if she was an outsider in her own mind, quietly observing the depths of “Lin Sanjiu” consciousness. She looked downward as she felt the light current of the water against her body. She suddenly spotted a gigantic object, so large that she could not see the far side of it. It was so large that she thought that it was part of the sea!

The gigantic object seemed to have possessed a sort of magnetism which pulled Lin Sanjiu toward it. She headed toward the object faster and faster. Just when she thought she was about to collide with it, there was a huge boom, and the object broke through the surface of the water. At the same time, Lin Sanjiu opened her eyes abruptly and sat up, panting heavily. Her Keen Senses had leveled up!

“How has it changed? Let me see...” Lin Sanjiu closed her eyes and controlled her breathing again and once again entered that meditative state.

【School of Higher Consciousness】Just as if a violinist knowing how to perform *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, or a soccer player knowing how to dribble across the field, that name appeared within her mind naturally.

Even though she only sat up for a fraction of a second, when Lin Sanjiu entered her mindscape once again, she found that it had totally changed. When she opened her “eyes”, she realized that she was sitting on a small stool and there was thick children foam mat under her feet. There were many toys scattered throughout the room, such as teddy bears and toy cars and others. When she looked at her hands and found that she was holding an educational

picture chart. There was also a red flower brooch pinned on her chest. It looked extreme strange on a grown woman like herself.

[What... is this place?]

“Hello, dear students!” a warm, enthusiastic female voice filled the room. Startled, Lin Sanjiu looked up and saw there was no one other than herself. There was a movie projector screen at the front of the room, and a voice suddenly came from the two speakers beside the screen: “I am your kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Manas[1]! I want to congratulate all of you on your graduation to the next level in Keen Senses and successfully enrolling into the【School of Higher Consciousness】!”

Lin Sanjiu’s mouth hung open as she looked around the room. Beside herself, there were still a few small stools around, but... there were only other toys sitting on the stool — a teddy bear, a Barbie, and a Transformer figurine.

[I must be your only student!]

Regardless of the audience, the voice over the pair of speakers continued, “Everyone must be curious about the difference between Intuition and Higher Consciousness, right? What we call ‘intuition’ is actually a sort of rapid judgment about a situation based on one’s previous experience, sensations, and emotions, etc. Thus, there is no guarantee that Keen Senses is correct 100% of the time.

“The root of our intuition lies in our subconscious mind. Higher Consciousness is a skill that is developed from our subconscious mind, and it is super powerful!” The tone used did sound like one meant for speaking to a group of young children. “Alright, now everyone will learn how to control their Higher Consciousness. The first step to do that is to have a thorough understanding of what it is. Little Bear, please don’t touch Barbie’s leg.”

Lin Sanjiu turned her head wanting to see that student who would have been banned from any kindergarten school. The teddy

bear was sitting silently in its seat, and the Barbie still wore the same smile.

“Okay, just as expected, our Lin Sanjiu was successfully distracted by my words. Humans are just that odd. Despite being in a highly unusual environment, any information worth of gossip still steals their attention like this...” the speaker said gloatingly.

[This teacher! She’s totally full of sh*t!]

“This is because human consciousness is affected by your inherited genes. A person consciousness is inherently attuned to topics that involve human reproduction. Did you know? A seemingly intuitive reaction is actually brought by the decision of your subconsciousness.”

“No matter what you say, it sounds like a random excuse...” Lin Sanjiu’s expression was still sour. Just as though the speaker heard her, the speaker changed the subject abruptly: “Now, we shall start our class. Please look at your picture chart.”

Lin Sanjiu took a closer look at the picture chart and saw that there was a drawing of a motherboard on the piece of paper. Honestly speaking, no children would be able to understand what is written there.

“This is the topic for today. The database in our consciousness.”

“Many people spend a lot of effort trying to sharpen their perception. However, what they do not know is that massive amounts of information are recorded by one’s eyes, nose, ears, body, and skin. Unfortunately, normal humans will never be able to access this information even if they try an entire lifetime, this is because this information is stored in one’s subconsciousness.”

“After you possess a higher consciousness, your subconsciousness will automatically filter through all the information in its database. It is not easy to understand this, so let me give you an example.”

After the speaker had said this, a close-up image of a bowl of instant noodles appeared on the projection screen with a “pa!” sound.

“Hey, I really dislike this bed of red hair,” Lin Sanjiu suddenly heard Marcie’s voice over the speakers, she sounded like she was quite some distance away. A pair of familiar hands appeared on the screen, tearing open a packet of condiment.

Lin Sanjiu looked down at her own hands half-wittedly and confirmed that the hands shown on the screen were hers. She had some impression of that instant noodle. During that month they spent in the supermarket, she often ate that brand of noodles. However, Lin Sanjiu could not remember Marcie saying those words before.

“What can I do? You have already taken on a corporeal body.” Lin Sanjiu recognized Luther’s voice.

“Well, you could make me look like Natalie Portman.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me. It will tire me out to keep that ability activated. Besides, her fans wouldn’t be happy to see her killing duoluozhongs!”

Once the screen turned black, Lin Sanjiu shuddered a little. She instantly knew what was wrong. The scene changed, and it now showed the incident which happened when she first saw Luther and Marcie at Zhu Mei’s house. At that time, both had transformed to look like her parents. Luther could use his Shapeshifting ability on another person beside himself!

She was unable to fathom how she could forget that since she witnessed it herself. “That meant that Septimus need not transform into Marcie. He could transform someone else into Marcie or even get that person to look like himself...” Lin Sanjiu mumbled to herself. Bizarrely, while it was supposed to be an infuriating matter, all she felt was a strange calm.

The screen suddenly turned black again, and Mrs. Manas voice sounded out from the speakers.

“The reason why Lin Sanjiu can’t remember that this has nothing to do with her muscles being more developed than her brain — though that is in fact true. This is because most people would just store such information in their subconscious mind. Under normal circumstance, no one would actually take notice.

“The information that is recorded in one’s subconscious mind for a mere 0.1-second glance can fill up over ten pages. If you use your Higher Consciousness, you will be able to filter and analyze the large amount of information and make a judgment... obtaining the observational skills of a legendary detective. But of course, you must know that you will use up a lot of your ability power to use Higher Consciousness to assess the information in your subconscious mind. With that being said, I hope that all my students are prudent about it. Unless it is necessary, don’t conveniently access that database, okay?

“Alright! That’s the end of our kindergarten class. I hope everyone can use their new knowledge and quickly enter elementary school. Class dismissed!”

[So, it just ended like that?] Lin Sanjiu still had many questions to ask, but she ran out of time. The voice disappeared. Following which, the entire scenery faded. When she opened her eyes once again, she was back in her tiny cubicle.

Translator’s Note: [1] The author referred to the teacher as Teacher Yi. The Buddhist term Manas is the closest term to the Chinese word.

Chapter 55: The Reason He Shouldn't Be Killed

Once Lin Sanjiu came out from her School of Higher Consciousness, Lin Sanjiu who spent all her energy, fell into a deep slumber almost instantly. She did not know how long she slept, but she woke up when it was already the set time to wake up.

[The current “Septimus” is not the real deal.]

This thought surfaced once she opened her eyes. She had no doubt about it.

“Xiao Jiu, you’re awake too?”

She lifted her curtains at her doorway and stepped out. Coincidentally, she met Fang Dan who came out of her own cubicle at the same time. Lin Sanjiu scanned Fang Dan from head to toe and tried to call out the information in her subconsciousness. She immediately understood what Mrs. Manas meant.

A horrifyingly astute observational skill combined with her heightened five senses, her eyes, ears, skin... Every second, every moment, they were recording massive amounts of information from the outside world... It was as if she had opened a door that she did not even know existed.

“If you dislike that person so much, you should just reject him directly.” After gathering a few information from the database of her subconsciousness in her mind, Lin Sanjiu somehow blurted that out.

“Huh? What... what do you mean?” Fang Dan’s face suddenly turned red.

Lin Sanjiu shot her a glance, “And even if you walk beside me, your suitor might still follow you.”

“Hey? How... how did you know?” Fang Dan was stunned as she

asked, stammering.

The answer was actually very simple. When Lin Sanjiu was still asleep, there wasn't sound coming from Fang Dan's cubicle. However, once Lin Sanjiu got out of her bed, there was a squeak from the bed board of from adjacent cubicle. Thereafter, Lin Sanjiu heard Fang Dan rushing to the doorway. Clearly, Fang Dan was waiting for Lin Sanjiu to come out.

At this moment, Lin Sanjiu was like a command center giving out instructions, her single thought evoked all the information recorded by her body even when she was asleep. Needless to mention, she also drew out the information she recorded the exact moment she pulled open her own curtains. Lin Sanjiu saw a pink card on the floor, and from the vague outlines of the words, it was definitely written by that relentless suitor. The reason why Fang Dan planned to walk beside Lin Sanjiu was because the suitor was waiting nearby for her.

Unfortunately, after a few scenarios and a few zoomed in images surfaced in her mind, Lin Sanjiu had no choice but to stop so she could recharge again. Her 【School of Higher Consciousness】 had just taken shape and the length which she could use her “Higher Consciousness” she had was still pitifully short. She had only used it for a bit, and it seemed to her she had reached the critical point where she risked using up all the “fuel”.

Fang Dan was astonished, “How did you know that I don't like him?”

“I woke up late, so most of the people in the building must have finished their dinner. But you'd rather wait for me with an empty stomach... Isn't that obvious?”

There was a long rectangular case bulging from Fang Dan's pants pocket. It was her chopstick case. Since she brought it along with her, it meant that she had not eaten. Watching Fang Dan's flabbergasted face, Lin Sanjiu added, “Oh, and tonight dinner is

your most hated — boiled mushrooms.”

“Huh! Didn’t you just wake up? How did you know?”

[That’s because... the cooks in Oasis aren’t that fantastic. When mushrooms are boiled, they exude an earthy smell. That smell lingers on everyone who has eaten their dinner.] But Lin Sanjiu did not say that out because she felt a little dizzy even after she just retrieved that bit of information. Apparently, that ability was very draining.

Just like how one’s brain dull out the sensation of the material of the clothes a person is wearing, the sensations she just felt would have been tuned out by her brain in the past. If that wasn’t the case, even a supercomputer would breakdown from the amount of information accumulated after a few days.

However, she now felt that all that information was processed as a unified whole and was being skilfully downloaded in the depths of her mind. If her ability was strong, she was sure that she could retrieve even more information from her subconscious mind... If it wasn’t for the limitation in “fuel”, it would be an extraordinary ability.

Both “Septimus” and “Marcie” seemed to have gone for dinner without her. As Lin Sanjiu and Fang Dan headed for Basement One’s exit, Lin Sanjiu turned to look at Fang Dan who looked as if she was prepping herself to meet her greatest enemy. Lin Sanjiu laughed, “Hey, I will help you get rid of your suitor, can you also help me out?”

Fang Dan was extremely grateful, though Lin Sanjiu was unsure why she hated that pitiful suitor that much. “Just tell me what you need, I will do my utmost to help you!”

“During dinner, can you look for Marcie and tell her that you have a headache. Then, go with her to the infirmary to get some medicine. Simple, right?” Lin Sanjiu’s eyes narrowed when she replied, “If she asks about me, just tell her that I am helping out

the well management team.”

Fang Dan did not detect anything, even though she was slightly puzzled by the request, she nodded her head and said, “No problem!”

Chatting along the way, they walked out of Basement One and found a man, with middle-parted hair, sitting on the stairs. When he spotted them, his eyes beamed and he ran toward them. However, before he reached them, he was halted by Lin Sanjiu. Lin Sanjiu gave him a cold look. Her expression along with the white bandage around her neck gave her an unsettling aura. The man gulped and swallowed back the words he was about to say.

“You better stay away from her today.”

All living things have a natural instinct to sense a powerful opponent. Lin Sanjiu was fairly satisfied that this man still had the sense to stop. Even though his expression turned rather nasty, and his veins were bulging, he did not follow them. Fang Dan was shocked, but that did not delay her. She hurried to the canteen while Lin Sanjiu stayed outside the canteen and waited at a secluded spot.

After 20 minutes, Marcie supported Fang Dan, who looked in pain, out of the canteen. Lin Sanjiu did not make a move, she just continued monitoring the entrance of the canteen. After a while, she saw Septimus walking out, while he picked his teeth at the same time. If she thought about it carefully, this was the first time in many days that Septimus was by himself. He walked about in a leisurely manner toward the dormitory, yawning and dragging his legs. Recently, they were not sent out for other mission. Instead, the few of them were fast becoming freeloaders. Nimble like a black cat in the night, Lin Sanjiu got into action.

The space between buildings in the factory compound was quite narrow. Without suspecting anything, Septimus hummed as he walked past one of the buildings. Suddenly, he was kicked, and he

lost his balance, falling into the small alleyway between two buildings. Before he could curse out, a cold hand gripped his throat, and he was pinned against the wall.

“Cough, cough. Who... Who are you...” the alleyway was very dark and he was still unable to clearly identify his assailant. Lin Sanjiu gave him a humorless smile, her white teeth were the only eye-catching feature amidst the darkness. Then, she said with a soft voice, “If you can’t see clearly, why don’t you take out your mobile phone and illuminate this place? Tian Minbo.”

The man she pinned to the wall fell silent for a second. With trembling legs, he finally spoke, “Xiao... Xiao Jiu? What are you saying? I... I...”

“Shut up! Don’t think that I can’t do anything to you just because Septimus transformed your looks.” Lin Sanjiu hissed, edging closer, her words seeped through her clenched teeth. “Why don’t I stab you repeatedly and see if your body will revert to its original form?”

The man did not say another word. Instead, he started to struggle as hard as he could. Voley already had enhanced strength so Lin Sanjiu could not allow him to continue resisting. With a flash of metallic silver, she held the chef’s knife against his neck. He immediately stopped moving — in contrast to the surrounding heat, he could clearly feel the cold metal knife against his skin.

“This is not an empty threat,” her voice was dangerously calm, “you won’t have enough time to dial 110. I don’t have any reason to let you live.” The man crumbled under the pressure of the murderous intent he felt. “Septimus” collapsed into a bout of tears and shouted, “Wait, wait... It wasn’t my idea to trick you like this...” Even when Voley was begging for his life, he kept Luther’s appearance. Apparently, he had no way of undoing the transformation. Lin Sanjiu was totally disgusted by him, she gave a faint laugh, “I don’t have to kill you. I can just break your legs and hand you over to Hei Zeji.”

Voley's face turned sheet white in a split second. He could never imagine that Lin Sanjiu would be acquainted with Hei Zeji. If she was going to hand him over to Hei Zeji, he would rather die quickly by her hands. He trembled and shook, "You can't do that!"

"Oh, why not?"

With much difficulty, he pulled out a paper from his pocket and raised it up weakly, "Because I am a Consular Officer!"

Chapter 56: Voley Clarifies the Series of Events

【VISA】

Place of issue: Hyperthermal Hell

Valid Destination: 1984

Valid From: Six months prior to the descent of 1984

This visa was issued by the Consular Officer of Hyperthermal Hell

“Look, I’m telling you the truth.” Voley slumped against the wall in fear with the knife at his neck. The piece of visa fluttered loudly as his hand trembled. “This was requested by someone, and I’ve yet to hand this to that person. Luckily, I have it on me...”

Lin Sanjiu scrutinized the visa. She found that it did match the visa that they found on Ren Nan’s body. “Who did you issue this visa to? There isn’t a name here,” as she said this, she stuffed the visa into her pocket.

Voley was about to cry. His expression looked oddly unsuitable on Luther’s face. “That’s for Septimus! All visas don’t have names. However, they belong to whoever it is issued to... You won’t be able to use it even if you snatch it away.”

“I don’t want to talk about that now, I have quite a lot of questions for you.” Lin Sanjiu flashed a cold smile at him. Without giving him a chance to interject, she kicked his knee and gripped the back of the collar when he fell. “I’m bringing you to a place where it’s safe to talk. You better not try anything funny. I can’t guarantee that the knife won’t slip out of my hand. You know my ability. At most, I would just give up on getting a visa. We can see if my ability is faster or yours.”

Voley could feel Lin Sanjiu’s mildly warm fingers through his

clothes, they weighed like a ton on his shoulders. Voley did not dare to make a move and agreed profusely. Lin Sanjiu knew that Voley was a very wily character that could even deceive a cunning man like Li Zhijun. If she wanted to pry even a dime of truth from the man, she needed Hu Changzai's help.

Lin Sanjiu estimated that more than 20 minutes had passed, so Fang Dan and "Marcie" should have already left — she listened from the door of the infirmary and confirmed it. After that, she opened the door and threw Voley onto the ground. The man landed with a heavy "thud" while she swiftly closed the door behind her. At the same time, she pinned Voley's leg to the ground with one of her feet.

As she expected, Hu Changzai was the only person in the room. Hu Changzai was startled when he saw them, and he nearly fell out of the small bed he was on. "What, what, what... what's the matter? Let's all settle this rationally. Isn't he your friend?"

Sure enough, as Voley had Luther's appearance, Hu Changzai had misunderstood the situation. Lin Sanjiu did not respond immediately. Instead, she stepped on Voley a little harder before she coldly explained, "This person isn't Luther. Voley, if you dare to even tell a single lie, we will know. Now, let me ask you, when did you start working together with Septimus? What is your objective?" Hu Changzai could tell that something was wrong. He sat on his bed and frowned while he stared at Voley.

[Two people against one.] Voley knew that circumstances were unfavorable for him. He deliberated over it and decided to adapt to the situation and tell them what he knew truthfully. Even though Hu Changzai was reasonably confused by Voley's reply, he nodded to Lin Sanjiu and confirmed that what Voley said was true. Lin Sanjiu felt a sense of relief only after his confirmation.

Voley's statement of events went like this:

After Voley had escaped from the pocket dimension, he lost his

car. When he was trying to look for another car, he found out about the existence of Oasis unintentionally. Following the information that he had obtained, he reached Oasis a few days earlier than Lin Sanjiu and the others. He quickly ingratiated himself with Chen Jinfeng.

However, he suddenly spotted a walkie-talkie one morning. He was really shocked when he saw it because it looked very familiar and he recognized that it was the set that he gave to Lin Sanjiu. He knew without a doubt that Lin Sanjiu and her companions were also in Oasis. Even though Voley did not wish to see her, he hid himself after he picked up the walkie-talkie. As expected, he saw Lin Sanjiu and overheard her conversation with Hu Changzai.

Due to the events in the pocket dimension, Voley did not dare to meet them or show himself as he was afraid that they might seek revenge against him. Nonetheless, he knew that he could not just leave it like a ticking time bomb, so he looked for Chen Jinfeng. He lied to Chen Jinfeng that Lin Sanjiu had a good item — hoping to stir up Chen Jinfeng's greed, and it was surprisingly easy. Besides, due to some reason, it was common practice for Oasis to send posthumans out for suicide missions. As a result, Chen Jinfeng did not think much about the matter and immediately decided that Lin Sanjiu, her companions, and even Hu Changzai would be sent out on a mission with Xu Xiaoyang's squad. At the very last moment, Chen Jinfeng kept Marcie behind.

The only problem was that both men didn't expect that Lin Sanjiu and her companions would return unharmed. After this, the development of events was out of his expectation.

Just a few days ago, Voley was summoned by Jin Chenfeng and was introduced to a new "assistant". When Voley saw that person, he almost ran away, thinking that he had fallen into a trap. The assistant was none other than Luther. Chen Jinfeng quickly explained everything. Voley found out that the Luther he saw was actually Septimus now. Somehow, Septimus wanted to get rid of

the same people. As they shared the same goal, naturally, they decided to team up.

After Marcie had disappeared, Septimus did not comment about it. Septimus only requested for Voley to act like him while he disguised himself as Marcie. Both of them worked together and fooled Lin Sanjiu for a couple of days...

When Lin Sanjiu saw the familiar face which had gone through so many dangerous events with her, she simply could not control her anger, "That's why 'Marcie' has been commenting about how powerful that sandstorm was. All of you are trying to find out about my ability!" There were a couple of times when she nearly told Marcie the truth, but she did not do so because she had been disturbed by the constant warnings from her Keen Senses ability. Unexpectedly, Hu Changzai turned pale when he heard this.

"You mean that is not really 'Marcie'?" he stammered. Lin Sanjiu's heart skipped a beat when she heard this. "When she came in with Fang Dan to get some medicine just... just now. We chatted for a while, and I told... told her what happened." Lin Sanjiu could feel her blood pressure rising, if Voley wasn't here, she would have screamed out loudly. She composed herself and finally asked amidst Hu Changzai's frantic explanations and apologies, "Did you tell her the logic behind 'that'?"

"No, no! I only told her that you have 'that thing'!" Hu Changzai shot a glance at Voley before he replied hastily. Voley rolled his eyes suspiciously.

Lin Sanjiu remained silent for a minute.

"Voley, here's another question. Does Chen Jinfeng know that both you and Septimus are in disguise?" she asked after some time.

"No... he doesn't," Voley replied quickly, "Septimus only made that request after Chen Jinfeng left..."

"If that's the case..." She looked at Voley then at the guilt-ridden

Hu Changzai. Suddenly, she walked over to Hu Changzai and whispered a few sentences to him.

Voley tried his best to listen, but he could not hear what she said. He only saw Hu Changzai immediately nodding after Lin Sanjiu finished what she had to say. Hu Changzai looked eager to atone for his mistake and quietly said a few words in reply.

[What were they talking about?] Just as Voley was trying to guess the content of their conversation, his attention was drawn to the sound of flapping wings coming from his right shoulder. When he turned to look, he realized that a dark green praying mantis had landed on his shoulder.

That pair of blood red compound eyes covered with black patterns was almost the size of his face. The praying mantis moved its triangular head in front of Voley. Its scythe-like front legs gripped the base of Voley's neck tightly— as if it could tear through his skin any moment. Voley, who stood up just now, quickly fell to the ground again as his legs grew weak. He was so scared that he couldn't say a word.

“I want you to do something for me right now... If you don't obey me and try to activate your ability, this creature will cut your head off immediately,” Lin Sanjiu said mildly as she smiled.

Chapter 57: Marcie's Return!

“Septimus, I just went to see Executive Chen...”

Lifting the curtains, Voley stuck his head into a cubicle. His expression was a little odd.

“Didn’t I tell you to call me Marcie!” Septimus lectured in annoyance as he looked up from his thoughts. He was in “Marcie” form and was sitting on her bed. Then, he immediately asked, “What does he want?”

“Right... right!” Voley entered the cubicle and replied carefully with a smile, “Well, he drank quite a lot beer, his face was red... I am not sure if he’d seen you somewhere. He suddenly pulled me just now and asked persistently if I had seen Marcie. Well, I think he is somewhat interested.”

Any man would know the underlying meaning behind Voley’s words. Septimus looked up in shock. “So, that was his intention that day,” he mumbled to himself. On the day that Septimus looked for Chen Jinfeng, he tried to sound out Chen Jinfeng with his words. He had a vague idea that Chen Jinfeng did something, but Chen Jinfeng naturally wouldn’t expose such a deed.

Due to Marcie’s disappearance and the specific way he could get her back, Septimus did not say anything to anyone. This was the exact reason he carefully avoided Chen Jinfeng after he and Voley changed their appearances. He was afraid that it would raise more troublesome issues. But now that this had happened, he couldn’t help feeling that it would be something difficult to deal with.

“Forget it. Just ignore him,” Septimus replied only after he thought for a long time.

Voley showed him an uneasy expression. Before he left the infirmary, Lin Sanjiu snapped his fingers, and the praying mantis on his shoulder became invisible. Though he could no longer see

the praying mantis, it was almost as if he could still feel those cold scythe-like front legs, one above his Adam's apple and the other below. Furthermore, Lin Sanjiu made herself very clear. She told him that since he was so full of ideas and schemes, he should be the one to think up of a method to get Septimus to call out the real Marcie. If he failed to do so, Lin Sanjiu would give up on the visa and hand him over to Hei Zeji.

“No, we can't do that! Executive Chen drank quite a lot. He mentioned Marcie continuously, and he even said that he would come over to look for her! It took me some effort to distract him, but you have to come up with something better!” Voley said anxiously.

“F*ck it!” Septimus cursed as he felt a sudden headache. This was not the time to offend Chen Jinfeng... It did cross his mind to meet Chen Jinfeng himself; unfortunately, he knew nothing about the liaisons between men and women so he was worried that Chen Jinfeng might discover that something was wrong. After he thought about it, he suddenly gritted his teeth, “Forget it, I will just coax Marcie to go! Anyway, he can't do anything to her...”

Before Voley could understand what he meant, Septimus stood up and made a gesture. Both returned to their original appearance. After Voley regained his own appearance, he looked at his short, stubby hands and finally gave a sigh of relief. Septimus eyed him coldly for a second and said with his usual stoic voice, “I will call Marcie out right now. During this time, you better keep a close eye on Lin Sanjiu. Don't let Lin Sanjiu anywhere near her. Understand?” Voley nodded his head repeatedly.

“She recognizes you, it'll be bad if she sees you. You should go out now!”

When Septimus said that, as if he had been pardoned for a crime, Voley parroted those words and left the cubicle quickly. His actions made Septimus look at him for a second longer, but in the end, Septimus did not say a word. After the curtains returned to

their original position and Voley's footsteps were much farther, Septimus closed his eyes. After a while, a few veins started appeared on his forehead. His body started to flicker like an old television image. Following which, a figure fell out of his body. He steadied himself and confirmed that it was Marcie.

Marcie retained the appearance of that fated day: her red hair was a mess, her clothes were in disarray, and even her face was still flushed from exertion during her struggle. When she realized that the person in front of her was Septimus, her eyes glowed, and she cried out in surprise: "You're back? Why did you go so far that you couldn't even maintain the ability!"

"At that time, we were in grave danger." Septimus smiled at her. "Look, I called you out once I came back. Why are you like this? What happened?"

"Don't bring it up." Marcie face turned ashen when she thought of Chen Jinfeng, "I will not let that b*stard get away with this." She patted the dust off her face and body in revulsion, as if she was trying to wipe herself clean. Thereafter, she sat on the floor looking a little tired. Septimus nodded his head and was just about to say something. Suddenly, he noticed Marcie with an opened mouth and a stunned expression. She was looking at his head. He was about to turn and find out for himself, but he only heard a sharp whistling sound and felt a heavy blow to his head. He immediately lost consciousness.

Marcie — the real deal — was stupefied. Lin Sanjiu appeared from nowhere and delivered a strong blow with her police baton, rendering Septimus unconscious.

"What... what are you doing?" Marcie wiped her face, somewhat unable to quite believe what she saw. She looked up at the top of the narrow thin wall and then at Lin Sanjiu. "Why did you hit him? That's Luther's body."

Lin Sanjiu shot her a glance. As if a huge boulder was removed

from her chest, she gave a long sigh and walked toward Marcie to take a closer look. There was an almost indiscernible smile on Lin Sanjiu face when she said, “I finally got you out...”

Marcie did not understand anything that was happening. She patted Lin Sanjiu’s shoulder while her face with filled with perplexity when she saw Hu Changzai gingerly entering the cubicle. Hu Changzai greeted her and quickly tied up the unconscious Septimus. It took almost half an hour for Lin Sanjiu to explained to Marcie what had happened over the few days. When she finished, Marcie was in a daze for quite some time. Marcie’s eyes never left Septimus during this time. After some time, she sighed, “So, that was what happened... it has already been five days.”

“I know... All twelve of you have been together in the past. You must feel terrible after knowing what Septimus have done...” Lin Sanjiu quickly consoled afraid that Marcie would be upset.

“No, I’m alright. You don’t have to console me.” Marcie gave her an unexpected smile, though it was mostly to placate Lin Sanjiu, Marcie did not look dejected. “Xiao Jiu, I remembered something, and I will verify it now. Leave Septimus with me. I will look for you later, okay?”

Lin Sanjiu looked back at her a little hesitantly. There was a gentle watery glow in Marcie’s pair of green eyes, “When I returned to Luther’s original body, my ability leveled up. You don’t have to be worried for me. And, thank you,” she said this very sincerely.

Lin Sanjiu gave it some consideration and nodded, “Okay, I’ll leave him with you but please be careful,” after she said that, she signaled to Hu Changzai, and both left the cubicle quietly, leaving Marcie alone with Septimus inside. Most of the people in Basement One had already left for their duties, so it was almost empty. Their footsteps echoed through the empty basement and could be heard from afar. Just as they stepped into the first floor, a nervous face

appeared before them. “Sister Lin, how’s everything? Can you please keep that thing now?” It was Voley.

He shifted his neck stiffly to one side as if he could dodge the large praying mantis on his right shoulder. Lin Sanjiu gave him an evil eye. That praying mantis was just an effect created by her Pygmalion Choker, and it dissipated after five minutes, that was why she made it invisible. This time round, the mental construct that Hu Changzai described was “the ability to summon monstrous insects which can become invisible”. It actually had no real combative value. If Voley was just a little braver, or just tried to resist a little, he would have realized that the praying mantis was just a paper tiger.

“You care too much about your survival.” She sighed and said, “Just to keep living, you can ignore anything...” as she said this, she stretched her hand toward Voley’s shoulder. Voley approached her gratefully and before he could say “Than...”, Lin Sanjiu gave him a vicious knifehand strike. This was the second person she had made unconscious that day.

“What do you plan to do with him?” Shocked, Hu Changzai pushed his spectacles upwards.

“I’ll tie him up. When I have more time, I will squeeze a few visas from him.” Lin Sanjiu chuckled coldly.

Chapter 58: You Thought You Could Guess What Was Coming Next

Just when Voley had been bundled up like a parcel and thrown into the back of Lin Sanjiu's truck, Marcie crouched beside Septimus in her cubicle.

"Hey, wake up," as she said this, she slapped Septimus's face.

The latter quickly opened his drowsy eyes. Once he woke up, the pain at the back of his head also started throbbing. Septimus breathed in deeply with a hiss before asking, "What's going on? Why am I tied up?"

Marcie stared at him with her emerald eyes. "Nothing. I just have the sudden impulse to talk to you."

"Why do you have to tie me up? Oh... it must be Lin Sanjiu, right? Is she here?" When Septimus thought of this, he immediately looked around cautiously but spotted no one else. Marcie smiled at him and sat across him so that their eyes were at the same level.

"Septimus, even though our relationship is the worst, and we argue everytime we meet — I have to admit that this time we seemed to get along quite well."

"Did Lin Sanjiu said something to you?" Septimus asked in response, then he coughed a few times. "I'd advise you to listen to my side of the story..."

Without giving a proper response to Septimus, Marcie continued her monologue with a smile, "Of all the other eleven personalities, you are the second from last person I don't wish to see."

Those words seemed to possess some sort of magic as Septimus suddenly fell silent. He did not ask her who the first position belonged to.

“Isn’t it great that the sociopath didn’t appear? What sort of disorder did the sociopath have again...” She looked at the person in front of her and continued, “You should still remember what happened, right? Luther was sent to a mental asylum. Many international experts came to diagnose him and confirmed our presence, they confirmed 11 personalities.”

Marcie’s gentle feminine voice reverberated in the small cubicle, but the bounded person became quiet.

“None of the doctors met the last personality before, and we were also unfamiliar with him. Just when everyone thought that the 12th personality did not exist, a female doctor arrived. Do you still remember? She was quite beautiful... To understand more about this rare multiple personality disorder, she spoke to Luther for one entire night... The next day, people found her stark naked in her own office.

“They found her looking like a pregnant woman with a bulging belly. Inside her, they found items in her office such as her cushion, her files... all soaked in blood. They also found the words ‘I’m 12th’ sewed on her belly, and there was even a heart-shaped mark left beside those words.

“12th. That was the only thing the doctors knew about that personality. No one had ever seen him. Is it male or female? How old is he? What is his name? Nobody knew a thing. They could only conclude one thing from his behavior, he is a sociopath with a —”

Septimus opened his mouth: “...an antisocial personality disorder.”

His manner of speaking was a little weird. His enunciation carried a vague, ambiguous allure, his voice was velvety, and he seemed to pronounce each word with a twisted charm which made others want to hear him speak. Whether it was Luther or Septimus, they both did not speak that way.

Marcie's expression changed immediately since just now, she had been trying her best to stop her hand from trembling. She inhaled sharply and asked, "How can you prove that you are the real Septimus?"

He lifted his head and looked at Marcie for a moment before he flashed her a sincere smile.

"Oh, forget it. To be honest, it is quite tiring to mimic the way Septimus speaks," he spoke in a light and mild-mannered tone, it was a little unclear, but entirely different to how he usually spoke.

Marcie was dumbstruck for a moment as she looked at him blankly.

"That's weird. I chose specifically to act as your sworn enemy, Septimus, so that you wouldn't find out. Isn't it normal that he would go against you? Why did you become suspicious of me?" Septimus — or rather 12 — asked as he tilted his head, perplexed.

"Your enemy knows you best." There was a smile on Marcie's pale face.

12 nodded his head as if he fully agreed. "Of course. But, I am the one in control of Luther's body right now. If I can bring you out, I can definitely keep you back in... Even though it might be a little troublesome. Don't you remember?"

Marcie gritted her teeth, and with a swoosh, she extended her nails while their eyes locked, "Why don't you try?"

12 gave her nails a glance, then he frowned lightly. "It is useless, obviously. Yet, you still want to extend those... Oh, I remember! Apparently, you have leveled up... Let me see how much better you are after that level up." He suddenly showed a stiff smile. If a plastic mannequin could smile, it would definitely look like that.

"Let me warn you..." Marcie stood up and swiped her nails toward 12's body viciously. A draft created by the speed of that movement lifted the curtains at the doorway, "Don't make that

expression with Luther's face!"

Despite being bound into a bundle, 12 moved agilely like a fish. Using both of his legs, he pushed himself, rolled on the ground, and avoided Marcie's nails barely in time. He began to struggle, trying to escape from the ropes. However, there was no way Marcie was going to give him that opportunity. She struck again with her claws — 12 felt his eyes twitched, as a look of realization appeared on his face.

Marcie's nails had changed, it no longer had that metallic luster. Now, her nails seemed to have changed into a material with a matt glaze, and they were dangerously durable. There were deep slashes on the wall where her nails had struck, and he could even see the bed of the adjacent cubicle through the damaged walls. He understood now...

When she attacked him again, 12 did not dodge but took the attack straight on. The nails instantly drew a deep wound over his body. Fresh blood dripped on the floor accompanied by a pattering sound. He was using Luther's body right now — before Marcie felt sorry for injuring Luther's body, the ropes that bound 12 fell to the ground.

"Thanks for getting rid of those ropes," 12 said in an exceedingly polite manner, as he stepped out from the torn pieces of rope. "Now, just go back and see how I'll have fun."

Marcie immediately stood still. 12 laughed and stepped forward. Just when he was about to activate his ability, he uttered a soft, "Huh?"

"Your ability is gone, right?" the woman in front of him spoke, she sounded very pleased, "How unlucky! Even your passive skills are gone!"

12 looked up at her in shock. No matter what expression was on his face, it was as if an invisible screen covered his face, they were so superficial that none of them looked genuine.

When Marcie saw “Luther’s” expression, Marcie suppressed the discomfort she felt and rushed forward once again.

【A laundry bar soap will turn dirty itself】

Introduction: Anyone who is injured by the user’s nails will have their abilities (both passive and active skills) cleanly washed away for 120 seconds. A nail which had been tainted by the opponent’s blood will not possess this effect for the next 24 hours. The user can only proceed with activating this ability if the particular nail is clean.

After 12 had lost all of Luther’s ability, he was no different from an average person. He could not even last ten seconds. He was pushed onto the ground by Marcie who pinned him to the ground with one leg. She pulled both his arms to his back and secured them tightly with the bedsheet. Next, she apologized to Luther in her heart, reverted her nails to their normal form and landed a heavy blow to the back of 12’s head. 12 immediately fainted again.

This was the first time she used her ability, and she was able to subdue a scary person like 12. With this, Marcie gave a sigh of relief as she felt her body go limp as the tension slid away.

When she saw 12 lying on the ground with his eyes closed, her brows knitted. She suddenly felt that things might get a little thorny. After she thought for a moment, she decided that she had to inform Xiao Jiu... Marcie sighed and pushed 12 under her bed before she left her cubicle.

When Xiao Jiu left, she had forgotten to even ask where she was going. Just when Marcie was at the door of the basement floor feeling a little worried, not sure where to look for Lin Sanjiu, she suddenly heard someone calling her: “Marcie!”

She turned her head and saw a woman with long black hair. She didn’t recognize that woman. If Lin Sanjiu was around, she would have introduced Fang Dan. However, due to Luther’s split personality and shapeshifting abilities, the situation now became

quite complicated.

During the few days that 12 had disguised himself as Marcie, he met Fang Dan many times due to Lin Sanjiu, so Fang Dan recognized Marcie. However, on the day that Lin Sanjiu got to know Fang Dan, Marcie disappeared. Resulting in this situation where Fang Dan was a total stranger to the real Marcie.

“Who are you?” Marcie stared at the woman warily. After the events with 12 and Chen Jinfeng, Marcie became suspicious about others unconsciously.

Fang Dan wanted to say something, but she stopped. She looked at Marcie as if Marcie was a mental patient, she had no idea what that woman was thinking, “If you are looking for Xiao Jiu, she is helping the well management team!”

After she said that, she left. Before they left for the canteen, Lin Sanjiu told Fang Dan that she should tell Marcie that she was with the well management team. The thing was that the fake “Marcie” did not ask her that question, but Fang Dan kept that in mind. Since the real Marcie looked like she was looking for someone, Fang Dan decided to follow Lin Sanjiu instruction based on her own judgment.

Marcie was puzzled, but she followed that clue and went over to the well management team. The well management team worked very far from their building. Due to the unfortunate combination of events, it took Marcie a few rounds before concluding that Lin Sanjiu was not there and forty minutes had already passed by then.

Somehow, they finally found each other. After Lin Sanjiu heard Marcie’s words, she was stunned. She did not expect this complication to arise. After she got over her shock, she thought carefully for a moment and suddenly turned pale, “You just left him under the bed? What if he wakes up and keeps you back?”

“Don’t worry. It isn’t that easy to use Persona Separation to merge a persona back to Luther’s body, it is not a matter of a single

thought...” Marcie consoled Lin Sanjiu with a smile. “But how we should handle him next is the bigger headache.”

Even with that said, the two of them went back to the basement and headed toward Marcie’s cubicle. Lin Sanjiu informed Marcie about Voley’s identity, “Since we already found a Consular Officer, there is no reason for us to remain here. We will just put him in our vehicles and leave...” At the same time, Lin Sanjiu lifted the curtains and entered the cubicle. She bent over and looked under the bed. Marcie looked at Lin Sanjiu’s back and laughed out, “Did I beat him up too badly?”

Lin Sanjiu slowly turned her head to look back at Marcie. Her face was a deathly white, “But, there is no one under your bed...”

Chapter 59: Oasis Bares Its Fangs in the Morning

Under the bed, Lin Sanjiu saw only a pile of torn bedsheet. Marcie pulled out the bedsheet and realized instantly that she didn't plummet 12 hard enough. 12 must have woken up some point in time. Since the cleansing effect only lasted for 120 seconds, he regained his physical enhancements. Once he reverted to his original strength, a single bedsheet was certainly not strong enough to keep him bound. Marcie was suddenly gripped with regret, helplessness, and even a little fear. If she didn't waste her time searching for Lin Sanjiu for 40 minutes, he might not have been able to escape...

However, this was the biggest problem that weighed heavily on them: If 12 intentionally leaves Oasis and goes somewhere further, Marcie would disappear once again.

Once she thought of that, Lin Sanjiu grew restless, "Marcie, I don't think he went far, why don't we look for him now? Anyway, the entrance of the factory compound is guarded..."

Marcie sighed after hearing Lin Sanjiu's suggestion, "He is still in Oasis. I can sense it." Looking at Lin Sanjiu, she explained a little impatiently, "For example, if I can move freely within a 100 meters radius from Luther... I would feel a sense of danger when we are about 70 meters apart. However, right now, I don't feel this feeling at all. This means that he's not far from us. I am sure of that."

Lin Sanjiu frowned, not knowing if it could be considered good news. Even though Marcie didn't face the risk of disappearing now, that also meant that 12 was nearby, monitoring them secretly.

[But, where?]

After she mulled over it for a while, she clapped her hands

together and finally made a decision. “Marcie, let’s go. Hear me out, I have an idea,” Lin Sanjiu said with a serious expression.

“We have already found a Consular Officer. Oasis is a complicated place; furthermore, Chen Jinfeng has an agenda against us. If not for the series of events that happened over the few days, only a fool will continue staying in this place. Since 12 has disappeared, we should make the first move and leave Oasis. If we wait outside Oasis for him, we will get him somehow.

“Even though Oasis is created by modifying a factory compound, all the other exits are locked for security reasons. Even the plot of land used for farming is surrounded by high walls and metal gates. If 12 wanted to leave, he had to leave officially. Otherwise, he would have to climb over the walls or force his way past the main entrance. No matter what method he chooses, we can just keep watch outside.”

Even though that was just a vague plan, it sounded quite feasible — Marcie’s face visibly brightened as she listened to Lin Sanjiu. With a less dejected face, she agreed, “Say no more, this is definitely worth a try.”

For this plan to work, they only had one problem: How were they going to secretly leave with their vehicles?

It might be easy for them without their vehicles. However, driving their vehicles just to another spot would easily draw attention, let alone blatantly driving all three vehicles out of Oasis.

“Let’s wait till morning. We can secretly go out of this building and assess the situation.” This was the only unimpressive idea Lin Sanjiu could come up with after thinking for a long time. “Almost everyone is asleep in the morning, so security would be laxer. At the same time, you must stay alert, if you sense that 12 is getting too far from you, you have to tell me.”

Marcie nodded her head worriedly. In the past, with all twelve personalities in the same body, none of them could hurt each

other. However, with the current situation, she could not help recalling the traumatic experience of witnessing the aftermath of what happened to the female doctor at the mental asylum.

Lin Sanjiu sighed softly when she saw Marcie's face. After they had discussed about their morning plan, they kept quiet with heavy-laden hearts. Knowing that a homicidal maniac was spying on them, they did not dare to split up. Both squeezed into Lin Sanjiu's tiny bed and somewhat managed to rest awhile. After some time, they heard the rising volume of people's voices and various noise coming from the first floor. It was followed by multiple footsteps and the smell of food. Lin Sanjiu knew that the duties for that day had ended and once again it was mealtime.

Considering their planned operation in the morning, both tried to eat as much as they could even without an appetite. They returned to the bed and laid for two to three hours waiting as the basement grew slightly brighter. The people in the basement gradually fell asleep, and the basement was filled with the sound of breathing.

When they felt that most of the people were fast asleep, Lin Sanjiu sat up and beckoned for Marcie to follow her. They quietly walked along the corridor, trying to keep their footsteps as light as possible. Fang Dan placed down the charred book she was reading and crooked her head when she noticed two pairs of feet creeping past her curtains.

"I'm a little worried about Luther," Marcie confessed quietly after they walked past about 200 over cubicles.

"Why?"

"He doesn't know anything about that incident with the female doctor." Marcie grimaced, "Another personality took over the body after it happened. The doctors discussed with the ten of us, and we decided to hide the matter from Luther."

Marcie sighed and continued, "At that time, Luther was still

young, he was just a kid... When you first got to know us, you saw how proud he was that he had multiple personalities. He always felt that it was cool to have this disorder. If he found out that there was a monster hiding in his body, and that he had murdered an innocent woman with his bare hands..." Marcie stopped at this point.

Lin Sanjiu concurred silently. Even though Luther had already lived in different apocalyptic settings for a total of two years, perhaps because he had people around him and because he did not experience anything too cruel, Luther managed to keep a gentle, straightforward personality just like many other teenagers his age. Lin Sanjiu was certain that he wouldn't be able to accept that something like that happened. She wasn't even sure if she, herself, could accept such trauma if it happened to her.

Lin Sanjiu knew that Marcie was very close to Luther, yet she did not know how to console her, so she just patted Marcie's shoulder lightly. They stopped when they reached the entrance to the stairway. As expected, they saw Xiao Yu sitting on a stool guarding the door. Xiao Yu looked exhausted as she leaned against the wall, closing her eyes, her head was drooping.

"Why is she so afraid that people would go out during the day?" Lin Sanjiu remarked softly, feeling suspicious. Lin Sanjiu observed Xiao Yu carefully; Xiao Yu was sitting in the middle of the corridor to the door, so it was really quite difficult to sneak past her. Just when Lin Sanjiu was about to try her luck, she had a sudden thought. She used her【School of Higher Consciousness】and processed what she had just seen. It was hard to believe that her glance which lasted barely half a second held so much information. She couldn't help feeling that she usually walked around with her eyes closed.

There was a glass of water and a piece of folded paper beside Xiao Yu. From the back of the paper, she could see the vague outline of the content written in black pen — five days before, Lin Sanjiu also

saw a similar piece of paper beside Xiao Yu. She instinctively retrieved the image from five days ago. Once the image was enlarged and the words were reflected, she made out what was written.

The paper was a name list of the five operations administrators and some main tasks. When Lin Sanjiu compared the two pieces of paper, she realized that within the five days, three of the administrators had been replaced. One of them was Sister Li. The reason they were replaced was the same: individuals from their building went out during the day. This was probably the reason why Xiao Yu became oversensitive over that issue.

Lin Sanjiu quickly deactivated her ability before she spent too much energy. She paused for a few seconds before she whispered to Marcie, “Be careful, let’s try to slip past her.”

Marcie nodded and tiptoed forward. She strode over Xiao Yu’s glass of water. She was nimble, so she quickly reached the basement door. She carefully opened the door and mouthed for Lin Sanjiu to follow her. Both slipped out of the door without making a sound. Xiao Yu did not notice anything as she rested her head on her own shoulders and fell asleep fully.

After they closed the door, a head appeared in the corridor not far from them. The person looked in Xiao Yu’s direction, perplexed and secured her long hair behind her ears. That person was Fang Dan. She followed both women because she suddenly felt curious.

Fang Dan looked around to check that there was no one; Xiao Yu was also fast asleep. Fang Dan felt as if she was a thief, and her face flushed with excitement. Following Marcie, she pulled out the door stealthily.

After they left Basement One, both women headed for the main hall. Fang Dan tried to hear their almost soundless footsteps and followed behind them. As there were no lights in the stairways, it was very dark. Fang Dan felt her way upstairs. Suddenly, she

staggered as she stumbled and nearly fell due to some broken concrete on the floor. She steadied herself hastily, but she accidentally kicked a piece of concrete down the stairs.

Thud thud thud.

It rolled down the stairs and hit the door at Basement One. The sound it made echoed in the stairway, and Fang Dan could even hear some noise from behind the door.

Fang Dan's heart leaped from her chest. She was so afraid that she ran up three steps with each stride. She rushed into the main hall — even though she did not know how she would return later, she wanted to evade Xiao Yu for now!

By then, the main hall should have been blazingly hot, but it was much darker than Fang Dan had expected. The vicious daytime sunlight even seemed muted. Fang Dan blinked in confusion, unable to react immediately. Her eyes swept the area, and she spotted the two people. They were standing motionlessly at the entrance of the building. The sunlight which flooded in from the entrance gave them distinctly black shadows. Fang Dan looked behind her and quickly walked toward them.

Before they could even hear her footstep, as if she had eyes at the back of her head, Lin Sanjiu turned behind to look at Fang Dan. Lin Sanjiu's reaction shocked Fang Dan. Fang Dan wanted to say something, but the scenery outside caught her attention. Her mouth hung open as she stood stunned.

There were numerous duoluozhongs in the skies outside. Those duoluozhongs had developed raven black wings and were flying everywhere. There were so many duoluozhongs around that they blocked a lot of the sunlight. The ground was covered by patches of their shadows. There were even ten over duoluozhongs on the roofs of some of the buildings, they walked around without wings but with the familiar long mouthparts.

Lin Sanjiu had a very tense expression. She placed a finger over

her lips signaling for Fang Dan to keep quiet. Fang Dan's forehead was covered in cold sweat as she nodded repeatedly. Suddenly, an ear-piercing scream tore through the silence. At that moment, their blood froze.

Xiao Yu had managed to chase after them, but she now sat limply on the ground. Her face was pale, and tears streaked down her face. Her lips quivered a few times, and she finally let out a sharp meaningless scream again: "Ahhhhh... Ahhhhhh... Ahhhhhh!"

Before Lin Sanjiu could say "Sh*t!", the duoluozhongs started landing on the ground outside their building, stirring up a cloud of dust.

Chapter 60: Broadcast

【Planar World, Lin Sanjiu's card deck】

Police Baton ×1

Description: It's almost out of battery. Please take note of the instructions.

Small knives ×3

Description: Cheap fruit knives. If you are cut by one of these, you can stop the bleeding with a single band-aid.

Brick ×1

Description: Building material. Gangsters from Northeast China and Beijing enjoy using this to scare people, supposedly.

Pygmalion Choker | Cooldown time left: 8 hours 9 mins

Gentle word of advice: Please take care of your own safety.

“You gotta be f*cking kidding me!” Lin Sanjiu exploded, she pulled Xiao Yu up and ran like crazy. Without a second of delay, Fang Dan and Marcie followed behind Lin Sanjiu swiftly. They ran for the stairway. Usually, that distance was not that far, but today they seemed to take forever — Before they even got close, a black shadow flew above their heads.

Deep cracks appeared on the portions of the ceiling where the black shadow brushed past, and concrete and sawdust fell like rain. Covering their heads and faces and avoid the falling debris slowed them down significantly.

The black shadow landed with a thump in front of the women. It retracted its shiny raven black wings. Lin Sanjiu looked behind her and found that there were another five other winged duoluozhongs rushing toward them. A normal duoluozhong was outside, but it left the moment it saw the back of those winged duoluozhongs.

The winged duoluozhongs were very tall; they reminded Lin

Sanjiu of the two duoluozhongs she met in the public security bureau. Their skin on their body and wings were not wrinkly and sticky, neither did they have a smooth, human-like skin. Instead, their skins had a dark brown glossy surface, a little like a beetle's carapace.

If not for their human-like torsos, they looked like gigantic cockroaches from behind.

"Sob..." Xiao Yu fell to the ground weakly with unfocused eyes, she was too afraid to even move. Lin Sanjiu couldn't help cursing inwardly when she saw Xiao Yu.

"Fight! Let's fight!" Fang Dan's voice trembled when she said that. "Do all of you have a weapon?"

Lin Sanjiu stared at one of the duoluozhong while cold sweat covered her entire body. That duoluozhong blinked at her as if showing its delight. At that moment, she smelt a familiar scent. They usually have an unpleasant stench, but this duoluozhong was emanating a faint fragrance. It was so familiar...

It was the smell of washing powder.

As water was a precious resource, in the entire Oasis, only the Executives' building had washing powder as they were the only ones with the privilege to wash their clothes.

This duoluozhong was wearing an Executive's shirt. Or rather, its clothes had been washed, just like the Executives'. Lin Sanjiu gritted her teeth tightly as the horrifying speculations which filled her mind all pointed to very shocking conclusions. The main hall was very quiet, other than Xiao Yu's sobbing voice, the duoluozhongs did not make the unique buzzing noise that they usually had. It was as if they intentionally controlled themselves.

In fact, if they listened carefully, they would've noticed that even with the alarming number of duoluozhongs flying in the sky, there were silent. It was just like watching an old film with animation

but no sound.

Before the duoluozhongs could attack, Lin Sanjiu suddenly took action. She kicked Xiao Yu toward Fang Dan and shouted, “Blow your whistle! Alert everyone! Marcie and I will hold them back here!”

Once she moved, the duoluozhongs surrounding them also reacted. Some extended their wings, others swung their mouthparts, but they all maintained their silence when they attacked. Marcie had full confidence in Lin Sanjiu. Once Lin Sanjiu said that, Marcie rushed over to Fang Dan’s side and swung an impactful kick, pushing back a duoluozhong which attempted to attack Fang Dan.

Fang Dan’s calf grew a little weak. She looked down and saw the whistle in front of Xiao Yu’s chest. She recognized that whistle, it was used every night to wake everyone in their building. She scrambled for the whistle and pulled it off Xiao Yu. She did not even pause to question Lin Sanjiu, she just blew the whistle — The main hall was filled with a sharp whistle which reverberated through the building.

The duoluozhongs were undoubtedly a little startled, but they attacked with more persistence. It was very obvious that they wanted to kill all of them before they made any more noise. They were much more powerful than the normal duoluozhongs. Their mouthparts moved so quickly that they were even a little hard to track. In just a short time, Lin Sanjiu was covered with bleeding wounds. She pulled out her police baton and made no attempt to use its shock function sparingly. Her counterattack was accompanied by the cackling sound of electricity as she managed to defend herself against the combined attack of two duoluozhongs.

The sharp shrills from the whistle rang out a few times. Then, Fang Dan released the whistle and held her throat. With the loudest voice she could summon, she shouted, “DUOLUOZHONGS INVADDED OASIS! DUOLUOZHONGS INVADDED OASIS!”

Then, she began whistling again.

Despite being in a difficult battle, Lin Sanjiu could clearly hear the disturbance from beneath them. Very quickly, they heard a flurry of footsteps from the two basement floors rushing toward the stairway. The first person who swung open the door to the main hall was a man.

Just as his eyes grew wide, witnessing the scene in the main hall, a duoluozhong suddenly whipped toward him. It flung its mouthpart, and a human head flew into mid air.

A row of dense sharp teeth grew around the rim of its mouthpart. They had never seen such a thing before. The headless body fell lifelessly to the ground. Just then, a series of fearful screams erupted from behind him. With that, the crowd which only half believed the warning became uncontrollable. Some of them ran away, some of them jostle their way through crying, others hollered that they wanted to get out... The wave after wave of noise flooded into the spacious hall which amplified their voices. The noise traveled throughout the building.

While the duoluozhongs attacked the crowd, Lin Sanjiu shot a glance at Marcie and Fang Dan. The three of them ran to the windows to the side of the main hall. "Crash!" Lin Sanjiu broke a window as she turned to look at the duoluozhongs chasing after them. "Fang Dan, go! Go and wake the people from the other buildings! Quick!"

Fang Dan clenched her teeth and leaped out of the window. Lin Sanjiu waved her left hand, and two cards flew behind her. She heard a painful shriek when her two cheap fruit knives dug deep into a duoluozhong's pair of eyes.

Meanwhile, two duoluozhongs chased after the people going down to Basement One, leaving a bloody mess as blood and limbs flew everywhere. Two other duoluozhong in the main hall made a low growl when they saw their injured companion, and both

rushed toward Lin Sanjiu.

Just then, Lin Sanjiu heard Fang Dan's screaming: "Wake up and fight! Duoluozhongs have invaded Oasis!" her thunderous screams woke the people in Oasis like an explosion. It took only a few seconds for the bewildered people to wake up, realize the situation they were in, and collapse with fears and tears.

"What's the use of waking them?" Marcie used her long nails to block a mouthpart coming at her, "Wouldn't those normal people die for nothing?"

"These duoluozhongs live within Oasis!" Lin Sanjiu blocked an attack. Next, she leaped and swung her police baton so that it hit one of the fruit knives, pushing that knife further into the duoluozhong's brain. The duoluozhong swayed for a second, crashed on the floor and stopped moving. Lin Sanjiu never had any martial arts training, but from the way she fought, she did have some talent for it.

Marcie was stunned for a moment when she heard what Lin Sanjiu said. She rolled forward to avoid a mouthpart that nearby hit her back. "What do you mean?"

"I think they've been hiding here for some time." Lin Sanjiu touched the duoluozhong's corpse and converted it into a card and held it in her hands. "There must be a reason why they refuse to reveal themselves to the people living in Oasis. I just want to prevent them from doing anything worse!"

Even though she said that, Lin Sanjiu did not expect that it would cause so many fatalities.

The situation outside was getting more and more complicated. The crying and screaming crowd ran around like headless chickens. Due to the panic, they were like trapped preys for the duoluozhongs; every now and then, blood spurted out from a victim in the crowd, and this drove the crowd into a wilder frenzy. The fear in the atmosphere was so thick it was almost tangible.

Rather than being killed by a duoluozhong, it was unfortunate that much more people died from the stampede.

Amidst this purgatory-like scene, a sudden long whistle suddenly rang out. Almost as if it was a command, the duoluozhongs in the main hall stopped their attack, the two in the basement also returned to the first floor. The duoluozhongs heard what Lin Sanjiu said just now. One of them peered at her with its narrowed eyes but did not say a word. Subsequently, the four duoluozhongs turned and flew out of the main hall.

As Lin Sanjiu looked out of the main entrance, the duoluozhongs which covered the skies like dark clouds flew into the distance, even the duoluozhongs wandering on the roofs somehow disappeared. Their retreat was quick and coordinated.

Marcie, somewhat unable to believe her eyes, was now dumbfounded. For a few seconds, Oasis fell into a sort of deadly silence. Everyone watched in a daze, unable to say a word, as the duoluozhongs flew away.

“Sob...”

Lin Sanjiu heard a soft cry. It was Xiao Yu. From the start, Xiao Yu had been scared out of her wits, so she laid in one corner. Somehow, it was also the reason she survived. Lin Sanjiu shuddered when she heard Xiao Yu. As if she suddenly realized something, Lin Sanjiu pulled Marcie and ran outside.

“This is our best chance! While Oasis is in a mess, let’s drive the vehicles...” as she said this, she looked around and ran toward their line of vehicles. Unfortunately, her plan was disrupted by a voice over the loudspeakers: “Attention! This is an announcement from Professor Bai’s office!”

The two women slowed down when they heard this.

An imposing male voice rang out over the loudspeakers, the atmosphere froze, and the deadly silence fell over the entire

compound once again. “Firstly, dear members do not worry, the duoluozhongs which invaded us have left. We are out of danger! Our five Executives are now at the scene of the incident, investigating the issue and helping deal with the aftermath. Please return to your own rooms after this broadcast; otherwise, you will be captured and banished from Oasis. I will repeat this again. Please return to your own rooms after this broadcast...”

If they went back now, they would never escape. If they were captured by Chen Jinfeng, they would never have the good fortune to get banished from this place. Lin Sanjiu and Marcie exchanged a look, and Lin Sanjiu pointed upward. After that, the women scaled the walls of the building nimbly each climbed onto an air-conditioning unit. As factories require a lot more air-conditioning units than households, it was a reasonable hiding place. The air-conditioning units could support their weight, and when they curled up, the space was just enough.

After the broadcast, the crowd moved like fearful herds of sheep back into their dormitory. The five Executives stomped around the compound, shouting commands. The sounds of corpses being dragged, interrogations, and feverish searching filled Oasis. The two women hid above the people below them and did not move for at least two hours. Finally, Oasis gradually regained its order.

As they had not been under the afternoon sun for a long time, the longer the two women hid on the air-conditioning units, the more unbearable it became.

“Bzzt!” Suddenly, the loudspeakers were filled with the sound of someone hitting a microphone.

It was the same man who spoke previously. “Attention everyone! This is an announcement from Professor Bai’s office! According to a reliable eyewitness, the tragic incident today occurred because two Oasis members colluded with the duoluozhongs and led them here. As the last hope for humanity, we will not tolerate such behavior... We will now announce the names of these two traitors.

“Lin Sanjiu. Marcie. The traitors are two women in their twenties or thirties. They might have multiple accomplices. The main culprit, Lin Sanjiu, wears a bandage around her neck while Marcie is a red-haired Caucasian...

“All Oasis members have the responsibility to look for these two traitors and report their locations to the authority... At the same time, all guards must now be on duty. The main entrance must be heavily guarded to prevent the traitors from escaping. I’ll repeat this again...”

Chapter 61: I still can't bear to leave

Nightfall came.

Under the flood of white light from the searchlight, Oasis was vastly different from the past nights. Tension hung in the air. Other than the few important teams who had to fulfill their usual duties, most of the other members grouped themselves in twos and threes, sharing a single flashlight. They were all searching for traces of the two traitors.

It has already been seven hours since the duoluozhongs appeared, but they still didn't find Lin Sanjiu and Marcie. Whether it was the canteen, the main hall, or the water treatment room... wherever there was a loudspeaker, people could hear the ongoing broadcast.

At that moment, a trembling female voice could be heard over the loudspeakers: "As an operational administrator, I quickly followed them when I sensed that something was amiss... But, I never guess that they could be so crazy! They actually colluded with the duoluozhongs and brought them here to kill us..."

It was Xiao Yu's voice.

After she finished what she had to say as an eyewitness, the imposing but emotionless male voice rang out again: "If Xiao Yu did not notify us in time today, the number of casualties would have definitely been more than 210. We sheltered them out of kindness, yet they betrayed us. They must be punished for their foolish act!"

Despite knowing that the loudspeakers could not pick up their response, many people raised their arms and shouted heatedly.

"Sentence them to death!"

"We have to avenge the deaths of those people!"

Oasis was instantly filled with wave after wave of irrational fury from its members.

A loud, recognizable voice joined the outcry of the people in the electrical maintenance team, and his voice merged with the crowd until it was indiscernible. After Hu Changzai shouted similar chants together with his colleagues, he put down his arm and looked around guiltily. He sighed relieved that no one had noticed him.

His ability did not work on audio and tv broadcasts so he could not tell if Xiao Yu was lying. However, perhaps due to his biased toward her because she had saved his life, he couldn't convince himself that Lin Sanjiu would collude with duoluozhongs to harm the people in Oasis. Unfortunately, it was obvious that he had to keep this opinion to himself especially in front of the irate crowd.

“Our work for today is almost done!” the team leader of the electrical maintenance team shouted suddenly, raising his arm, “Next, we must search every inch of Oasis and find those two traitors!”

His team members roared in agreement; they were so loud that the roof vibrated a little. The team leader brought out a box which was filled with flashlights and batteries. His team members queued up to collect their flashlights, but the team leader closed the box when it came to Hu Changzai's turn.

“I remember... You know that woman with the bandages!” The man gave Hu Changzai a sidelong glance. Hu Changzai felt that the multiple penetrating glares from behind him could almost pierce through his shirt.

“I, I didn't know that she was this sort of person...” He never told a lie in his life, his face turned red, “If I had known...”

The team leader eyed Hu Changzai but refrained from saying another word because Hu Changzai was usually very compliant. He pushed the box away and looked at the people standing behind Hu Changzai. His eyes swept through the group, and he spotted a man with middle-parted hair stepping forward, “Team Leader, I will go

with him.”

It was the suitor who gave Fang Dan that card.

Hu Changzai turned to look at that man. Even if Hu Changzai was just an honest man, he knew that the fact that he was the only one in the team who needed a partner meant something. He forced himself to smile at his colleague and said softly, “Okay, okay. Let’s go.”

Without another word, the team leader handed the flashlight to Li Shi — the name of the man with the middle-parted hair. Then, Li Shi walked out of the door with Hu Changzai walking silently beside him like a criminal trying to atone for his wrongdoings. After they walked around for a while, they only saw some zealous people from other search teams like theirs; they did not even catch a glimpse of Lin Sanjiu or Marcie.

All the possible exits in Oasis were guarded by the five Executives and their people, so everyone in Oasis believed that those women will not be able to escape even if they wore mecha suits. This was supported by the fact that the Executives, including Chen Jinfeng, all possessed powerful combative skills.

Hu Changzai felt very conflicted, he did not bother talking to Li Shi. He did not believe that Lin Sanjiu brought those duoluozhongs, so he hoped that she would not be found. On the other hand, he wished he could see her immediately so he could ask her what had happened exactly. Both men walked silently for a few minutes. Unexpectedly, Li Shi suddenly laughed.

“Actually, you’re not the only one who knows them both. I know them too.”

Hu Changzai gave him a wary look, but he did not know what Li Shi was trying to imply.

“Don’t you know about Fang Dan and me?” Li Shi turned to Hu Changzai and gave him an assuring smile, “That woman with

bandages is Fang Dan's friend, so I met her once." Hu Changzai stared at the man's eyes and instantly gave a sigh of relief. [That's right. This man is telling the truth.] Hu Changzai did not expect to meet someone in almost the same situation. He asked quickly, "So, you must know that Xiao Jiu will never do something like that. What should we do now?"

"Listen, I have an idea," Li Shi said without a hint of nervousness. "Isn't Fang Dan with the well management team? You might think that there are many groups of people searching for the two women but not many people actually went to look around the area near the well management team."

Hu Changzai hesitated for a moment, thinking carefully. He quickly understood Li Shi's words. As the well management team is one of the teams that affects the everyday operations of Oasis, the team members were on duty even that day — just like Li Shi and himself just now. Ironically, this was the precise reason why the members of the search team paid less attention to places bustling with activity. Similarly, none of the search groups went to disturb the backup generator team when they were working for a few hours. Furthermore, the well management team worked around the clock...

With a high-strung heart, Hu Changzai followed Li Shi to visit the well management team's work area with fear and expectation. When they reach the courtyard where the well was, it was surprisingly quiet. There wasn't even a single person.

The searchlight that was above the well had been switched off and turned aside. The place was only illuminated by the few small light bulbs on the wall. Their tools were neatly placed aside in a pile. The well that was dug was rather unsophisticated and laid under layers and layers of thermal insulation material. Using their single flashlight, the two men search the area without speaking. They looked in every possible hiding spot, but they found nothing.

After getting no response when he softly called their names a few

times, Hu Changzai went to touch a nearby bucket. He could feel a little bit of moisture right at the bottom of the bucket. That meant that the water management team was on duty, but just like their team, they ended their duty early.

[From what it seems, Xiao Jiu isn't here.] Hu Changzai could not hide his disappointment, he sighed inwardly. Li Shi was also visibly discouraged by their futile search. He shot Hu Changzai a glance. As he walked away from the work area with Hu Changzai, he sighed, "What thoughts do you have about where they might possibly choose to hide? As friends, we must find them first. We can't let them get captured by other people in Oasis."

Light reflected off Hu Changzai's spectacles. He was a little startled. He was just about to speak when he heard a soft "creak" behind him. Due to the silence, both men heard that sound clearly. They wouldn't have heard it if the broadcast was still ongoing, but it already stopped some time ago. Li Shi immediately turned to look behind, he pointed the flashlight at the ground not far from them.

The dim yellow spot of light circled the courtyard urgently...

The well's heavy cover suddenly moved, it was pushed upward a few times before it finally slid to the ground. A pale white hand came out from the side of the well, then another hand appeared, and a figure gradually rose from the well...

Long black hair hung over the woman's head, totally covering her face. Her white clothes were totally drenched. She left a trail of water behind her as she crawled outward. Li Shi could feel himself trembling, his face turned sheet-white when he saw that Sadako[1]-like figure. Oddly, his eyes lit up at the same time. His guess was right, that person was really hiding here! His voice was in his throat when he was suddenly struck violently from behind. Li Shi fell to the ground instantly.

Hu Changzai held a metal bucket in his hand while he panted

heavily. He used too much strength. Blood slowly seeped out from the back of Li Shi's head. Hu Changzai used his finger and anxiously checked for Li Shi's breathing. Finding that it was still stable, Hu Changzai's body slackened.

The "Sadako" hesitated for a moment, she pulled her hair to the back of her head, revealing Fang Dan's face. "So, you're not alone? Why did you come here with him?"

Hu Changzai looked at Fan Dang, smiling drily, "Let's drop that subject. If this guy didn't utter a sentence which I could recognize as a lie, all of you would have been captured. Anyway, how did things end up like this? Where is Xiao Jiu and Marcie? The entire Oasis is searching for all of you!"

"I know, that's why we went to hide. If we didn't hear your voice, we wouldn't know when we could come out." Fang Dan wiped away the water from her face and shouted toward the well, "Come up! It's really him."

Another two drenched "Sadako" quickly came out from the well. One of them had a head of red hair. As Hu Changzai was very conservative, he wished he could just remove his own eyes and hide them in his pockets. He lowered his head not daring to look at the women. With a flustered red face, he listened to Fang Dan's explanation: "These two idiots thought that they could hide in the air-conditioning units. With that high temperature, if they were to crouch there the entire day, they would have gotten a heat stroke... Fortunately, I know a hiding place underground. Otherwise, people would have found them long ago."

The two other women glared at her. Finally, Marcie couldn't hold back herself, "Technically, the incident today was caused by you..." Fang Dan was unaffected by her words, her expression did not change even a bit.

Lin Sanjiu felt a slight headache, and she quickly changed the subject, "We heard the broadcast from inside the well. When we

were hiding, we already discussed about the matter. We are sure that the duoluozhongs are reared in Oasis! To hide this fact, they prevent anyone from going out in the morning! We found out this secret, thus Oasis is hell-bent on killing us.”

Hu Changzai was shocked — he definitely could tell that it was true — he whispered in alarm, “What? Why would they? We have to make this public!”

“How are we supposed to do that? If we show ourselves, we will be caught immediately. On top of that, we don’t know the reason behind this. Who would even believe us?” Fang Dan said expressionlessly as she chewed on a piece of gum she pulled out from nowhere.

Lin Sanjiu paused stood still for a moment, before she suddenly said softly, “It is not impossible. We can make an announcement if we go to Professor Bai’s office. If we want to find out why they are rearing duoluozhongs here, is there any better method than asking the top person in this place?”

Everyone fell silent.

“That’s courting death,” Fang Dan murmured after some time. “We can just leave.”

Lin Sanjiu looked at her own hands. She clenched her own fists so tightly that her knuckles were turning white.

“Frankly speaking, I’m unwilling to just leave like that,” Lin Sanjiu said coldly, “Even though I don’t know why they would rear those duoluozhongs, they are definitely up to no good. The over 1000 Oasis members are all innocent lives. Yet, they are all so infuriating. Why should I just leave? I want to smash the truth in their faces and make my point.”

The group looked at each other. Marcie was the first to agree with a nod, “I agree! I also need to settle the score with Chen Jinfeng.”

“I don’t really have a strong opinion on this. But it sounds fun. I’ll join,” Fang Dan added.

Hu Changzai did not waver, he said softly, “I will help all of you. Professor Bai lives in that building. There is an Executive nearby. He is called Hai Tianqing. Listen up...”

They all knew that they had no time to lose, while they discussed their plan they left the well management team’s work area cautiously. A few minutes after their figures disappeared into the darkness, a person rose from a patch of grass. It is not an easy thing to knock a person out — Li Shi held his wound and half ran, half stumbled out of the courtyard. When he came out, he nearly collided with another member of the search team. As the person looked at him in surprise, he shouted hoarsely, “Quickly inform the Executives! I found the traitors! They are heading toward Professor Bai’s office!”

TN: [1] Sadako from the horror movie, The Ring.

Chapter 62: Lin Sanjiu Might Have Poor Numeracy Skills

From a bird's eye view of Oasis, four figures approached the Executives' Building with an alarming speed, churning up four streaks of dust. When the streaks of dust merged together, the entire Executives' Building was swallowed by dust and sand, such that they could only see a vague outline of each other.

The person guarding the building was Hai Tianqing, the largest person among all the Executives. He was tall and had an extremely muscular built, each inch of his body was covered with bulging muscles, making him look as intimidating and sturdy as a mountain. He coughed twice, choked by the dust in the air. As if using a palm-leaf fan, he swiped his huge hands about him trying to clear the dust around him. "Shouldn't all of you be more discreet!"

The dust settled a little gradually, and a person emerged from his left. It was a tall, slender man. Despite living in an extreme environment like Hyperthermal Hell, it was very obvious that the man valued his own appearance greatly. He wore a white collared shirt with a suit vest and cropped trousers which showed his ankles. His polished leather shoes were as shiny as his hair. The yuppie-styled man brushed off the sand on his shoulders and smiled, "Since we are here, did you get those hindrances to leave?"

"Wasn't the broadcast loud enough? Didn't you hear it?" an acid woman's voice drifted from the other side of the dust right the man finished his question.

The voice belonged to an OL [1], in office wear, wearing a pair of black framed glasses. Even though her tight office top and pencil skirt accentuated her full bosom and good figure, her hair worn in a tight bun and her stoic, uptight expression only gave her the image of a strict primary school educational director.

At that exact moment, there was a hurried voice over the loudspeakers: “Dear Oasis members, please return to your own dormitories and gather there...”

The yuppie gave a disapproving snort. Seeing the both of them acting hostile the moment they met, Chen Jinfeng quickly soothed the situation, “Alright, alright. Can you set aside your difference today on my account? Let’s work together to defeat those traitors?”

“If we want to bring that up, isn’t this mess caused by you?” the fifth Executive suddenly spoke loudly — a brown rabbit emerged from the sand. The group of people threw a glance at the rabbit without a hint of astonishment.

The color of the sand-covered rabbit was no different than when it was clean. It was a brownish yellow. However, the rabbit shook its body agitatedly. After shaking all the sand off his fur, it opened its rabbit lips and let out a human-like cold laughter. “Chen Jinfeng, I forgot to ask you something. Have you gotten your hands on that Pocket Dimension Escape Portal? Have you had sex with that Caucasian woman? This entire hubbub was created because of your f*cking idiotic greed.”

As a rabbit, its words were considerable uncouth and malicious, “After they discovered those duoluozhongs, you were also the first person to report to Professor Bai. From the current situation, things seem to be escalating. I’m really curious. I wonder what sort of sh*t is brewing in that vile gut of yours.”

Although he was mocked by the rabbit, Chen Jinfeng surprisingly suppressed his anger and did not say a word. However, his contorted face was red with anger. Hai Tianqing sighed and stepped forward. “Enough. Just shut up now. When this is over, you can quarrel all you want. Rabbit, you better watch your words. Even if you wake up with a bad temper, you should know when to stop.”

The brown rabbit scratched its ears with its back legs as if it did not understand. The five people — if they could be all called “people” — kept quiet. Standing or sitting, they waited for Lin Sanjiu and her group to arrive.

Ten minutes passed. No one moved.

Fifteen minutes passed. The yuppie took out a mirror and looked at his own reflection.

Twenty-five minutes passed. Hai Tianqing finally stood upright, “Why aren’t they here yet?”

Actually, Lin Sanjiu and her group had already reached the building some time ago; however, they were trying hard to come up with a plan. To avoid alerting Lin Sanjiu and her group, the broadcast mentioned that everyone would gather in their own dormitories. However, activating her【School of Higher Consciousness】, Lin Sanjiu already concluded from the information she processed that their plan to go to the Executives’ Building had been leaked. They also knew that all five Oasis Executives were waiting for them at their destination. Furthermore, the situation was not in their favor. Five to four.

After thinking for a while, none of them came up with any good idea. Just when they were discussing to ditch the plan altogether, Lin Sanjiu suddenly came to a decision, “Let’s just rush in there!”

The other three people looked at her as if she was a lunatic and shook their head vehemently.

“Let me finish. To simultaneous guard each direction, the five people would stand far apart from each other. So, we mustn’t go too close. Once they notice us, we will run away and split them up. We can fight them one on one. After that, we can gather in front of the Executives’ Building. If anyone of us is chased by two people at the same time, just raise the alarm and wait for the others to save you after they’ve finished with their battle.”

“It’s still very dangerous...”

“Think about it. We must fight with these Executives no matter what. If we don’t fight with them today, there is no way we can escape!” Lin Sanjiu gave it to them straight.

With that, the three of them had nothing to say. “Are there any objections? Okay, let’s discuss about our tactics.”

“That’s just like Xiao Jiu’s style, leading just by brawns...” Fang Dan grumbled. Subsequently, the four of them gathered and started discussing for a long time. Thanks to that timely broadcast, the crowd had already returned to their own dormitories. If it wasn’t for that, Lin Sanjiu and her group would have long been discovered.

Right now, they had already spent 20 minutes discussing on their battle tactics, while the Executives were waiting angrily. The yuppie had already styled his hair three times; Hai Tianqing swore like a sailor as he sat at the staircase to rest.

The OL crossed her arms, her head was lowered so her expression couldn’t be seen. The rabbit curled up into a fur ball and closed its eyes, it wasn’t clear if it was asleep. Chen Jinfeng was the only one who was searching for a glimpse of their target he tiptoed and cast his eyes into the distance.

From the corner of his eyes, he suddenly spotted a turf of fiery red flashing past the yellow sand. From afar, it reminded him of Marcie’s hair color. Chen Jinfeng felt a sudden rush of energy, he licked his lips and smirked. Without turning behind, he shouted, “I think I spotted one!” After he said that, he rushed forward and started chasing. He slowly disappeared leaving only four people behind.

“I will also...”

“Don’t move!” the OL commanded after Chen Jinfeng left. She stopped both Hai Tianqing and the yuppie. “They might be trying

to lure us away.”

Hai Tianqing went back to sit at the staircase, gloomily. From his expression, it was clear that he would rather fight than sit around doing nothing. Hearing this, a smile appeared on the yuppie’s face, “No, no. They’re not trying to lure us away. They are trying to split us up and defeat us one-on-one,” after he said this, he pointed to a figure in the distance. “I am interested in that one, let me take on that opponent.”

Hai Tianqing gave a grunt and remained in his spot as a signal of agreement. The OL frowned. After the yuppie ran out quickly, she turned to look at the other remaining person and rabbit. “Trying to fight with us one-on-one... isn’t that too naive? Even if we each chase after one of them, we can still leave one person to guard the door. Do you think anyone in their group can handle two Executives at the same time?”

After she waited for a moment, no one answered her. The brown rabbit seemed to have fallen into a deep sleep since just now; its round furry tummy rose in the same rhythm as its breathing. It looked very relaxed. Hai Tianqing leaned forward and listened for a moment, he stood up and flashed a satisfied smile, “Finally, it’s my turn, right?”

The OL sighed, repositioned her glasses and nodded.

Kicking up a cloud of dust, Hai Tianqing chased after his target rapidly.

The OL’s deduction was actually accurate, Lin Sanjiu’s tactic was almost akin to just attacking them straight on. It really wasn’t that well thought out. However, due to the pressure, Fang Dan and Hu Changzai had forgotten to inform Lin Sanjiu about a single thing.

With an average pace, footsteps approached them. The OL raised her head and looked up vigilantly.

A person walked toward them with her hands in her pockets.

That person with a nonchalant attitude was none other than Lin Sanjiu.

Due to the information that Fang Dan and Hu Changzai missed pointing out, at that instant, Lin Sanjiu decided to abandon her tactic to run after being spotted. Instead, she decided to walk straight up to her enemy.

When they were just 20 meters away from each other, Lin Sanjiu stopped. She looked at the OL who was shocked and began to ask, “Wasn’t there supposed to be five Executives? If it’s just you, I am confident that I can mow you down.”

TN: [1] The author used the term office lady (OL女) to describe the woman in office wear. I kept the term, but unlike in Japan where the term usually refers to a young, unmarried, low-level female employee, it holds a more generic meaning of a white-collared female employee in China.

Chapter 63: Are You Ever Afraid?

None of the other people noticed Lin Sanjiu blatantly appearing before the two Executives because everyone was busy, but this was something no one would even imagine.

Marcie was sprinting when suddenly an intense draft erupted in front of her. “Bang!” Somehow, Marcie’s head collided with the empty space ahead, and she nearly fell. She reached out and realized that there was an invisible wall, but she did not know how far it stretched. Holding her slightly injured nose, she turned to look at Chen Jinfeng, who was just a few meters away.

He couldn’t help smiling as he wrung his hands with a sick satisfaction. He stepped a few steps toward her and said, “Look. Here we meet once again.”

Marcie eyed him coldly. She placed her hands down and extended her nails.

Despite the light streaming from the searchlights above, it was difficult to spot Marcie’s extended nails which now lacked a reflective metallic surface. Only Marcie herself could see that the nails on both her last fingers had broken off, leaving two missing extensions.

But Chen Jinfeng paid no heed to her display of aggression. His eyes lingered on her bosom before he laughed, “Just so you know, I’ve seen Septimus.”

That statement caught Marcie’s attention.

“I guess you two are still on bad terms. I met him just this morning. He told me the reason why you disappeared and even gave me a little information about your nails...” there was a loathsome smile on Chen Jinfeng’s face as he spoke with a syrupy tone. “As long as I break off your nails one by one, you won’t be able to hurt me, right?”

[12 went to look for Chen Jinfeng? Where is he now?] Marcie knew that Chen Jinfeng would not answer her questions, so she didn't bother asking. "If you think you can evade my nails, then go ahead and try," she uttered monotonously.

Chen Jinfeng's smile visibly waned, then he clapped twice. As the sound he made faded, rings of colors radiated from where they stood. In less than a second, their entire surroundings changed entirely.

The poorly-lit factory compound disappeared and was replaced by a forest filled with a collection of weird plants. The sun was shining above, and the ground was covered by wild grass. Marcie was standing at a rather open area, she could even see a swath of blue sky through the canopy. Chen Jinfeng was no longer standing where he was just moments before. Now, there were only a few small yellow flowers in that spot.

Marcie took a few cautious steps forward, she placed all her focus on listening to her surroundings. She was trying to see if she could hear any movements nearby.

Chen Jinfeng's voice came down suddenly from the blue sky above: "The territory I showed you previously was just the basic version of my ability. I am using my full power today. How is it? Beautiful, right?"

Once he finished his sentence, a shadow spun rapidly toward Marcie. It was extremely fast, but at the same time, its speed created a very faint sound of rushing air. Marcie only realized its presence when it was just at the back of her head. She instantly dodged by turning her head. The unknown thing flew past her face and landed on the ground.

A streak of blood slowly appeared on the tip of Marcie's nose. Still startled, Marcie stared at the item and discovered that it was just a wildflower.

The petals of the hardened wildflower were wide-open, and each

of them had a sharp blade-like edge. Once it rotated, it was just like a beautiful meat grinder. Marcie picked up the flower and tested it on her hair. A few red locks of hair fell to the ground.

“Haha! How is it? Isn’t it pretty good? Let me tell you something. I can convert everything within my territory into a weapon. It is not just that wildflower you’re holding.”

Marcie tried to locate the direction where the voice originated from. But the very next second, Marcie found herself running as fast as she could as multiple flat blade-like fragments fell from the sky almost as if chasing her. She only stopped when she had run about twenty meters. When she turned to look behind, she saw multiple flat hardened clouds sticking out from the ground.

[F*ck. That is really everything!] Marcie thought to herself as she quickly examined her entire surroundings. Even though the sky seemed boundless, and the forest seemed to go on forever, Marcie knew that this illusory territory must have a boundary as it should still be constrained by the natural laws of reality. She remembered that when they were in the infirmary, that illusory territory was only the size of a single room. At that time, she could still hear noises from outside the room...

Despite the fact that this place was not as large as it appeared, the main problem was that she did not know where Chen Jinfeng was hiding.

“Now...” Chen Jinfeng’s voice rang out again. The instant Marcie reacted, she saw a green shadow coming toward her. She dodged with a somersault, only to realize that the attack was not aimed at her but only her hand. The vine which attacked her stopped in mid-air. It shook and two long nails it “held” dropped to the ground.

Marcie looked at her nails and discovered that the nails of her left ring finger and middle finger had been broken off.

“You only have eight nails left...” Chen Jinfeng amplified his

gloating voice. “After I get rid of all your nails, I will come out to see you. We’ll have some fun then, won’t we?”

Chen Jinfeng had gotten it wrong, Marcie only had six nails left. She could feel a bead of cold sweat rolling down her forehead, she was getting anxious. She knew that she could not withdraw her nails as they were her last line of defense.

[Where could he be?] Marcie searched her pockets, but it was disappointing. During their time here in Oasis, she already grew accustomed to the presence of electrical lights, so she didn’t even have a lighter on her. If she did, she might just try to burn the place down.

Just then, she spotted a black shadow from the corner of her eyes. Marcie had no idea what it was, but she didn’t dare to use her nails. Her only option was to run! When she turned to run, she did not expect to see over ten branches whizzing toward her. She panicked, quickly fell to the ground and rolled to one side as she protected her head with her hands.

“Great! Only seven left!” Chen Jinfeng laughed. Another of Marcie’s nail broke when it stuck onto one of the branches.

[Five.] That was the actual numbers of nails left. She had two nails on her left hand and three on her right.

[Huh?] Marcie suddenly stood still. The sun in Chen Jinfeng’s territory was not overly intense, but sunlight spilled throughout the entire place. She could see the green leaves and branches of the trees. She could see the azure blue sky. She could see everything clearly. The amount of light far exceeded that in the dim darkness in Oasis. Yet, she realized that Chen Jinfeng did not know the exact number of nails left on her fingers.

[Is he hiding behind something so he can’t see?] Marcie gulped. If she just defended herself passively like this, she would become a sitting duck once all her fingernails were broken. If so, she would rather take a risk. Her heartbeat soared, and she could even feel

the tremors through her chest, Marcie looked to both sides. Suddenly, she sprinted toward the thick forest. This time, she didn't hold back. Running at her fastest speed, she raced toward the forest leaving a series of afterimages behind.

Behind her, countless grass, leaves, branches, and flowers floated up in mid-air covering almost half the sky. It was quite a sight to behold.

“Oh? You are trying to hide?” Marcie did not know if she was imagining things, but Chen Jinfeng's tone seemed a little different. Shortly after, the hundreds over hundreds of weaponized flora and fauna followed her into the forest with a swoosh.

The threat did not only come from behind — in that instant, Chen Jinfeng also started to weaponized the branches and leaves in the forest. Marcie could see the menacing amount of razor-sharp edges gathering before her. They rained down upon her.

Marcie, herself, did not know how she managed to move forward. Her forearms were covered in blood as she used them to protect her head and face, and some of the cuts on her body were so deep that they reached her bones. A few steel-like flowers had embedded themselves in her thigh, so every painful step forward felt as if the nerves in her legs were screaming for her to stop.

Needless to say, her clothes were in tatters after that hurricane-like attack, exposing her fair skin and bleeding wounds. Despite that, Chen Jinfeng did not make a single comment about her half-exposed state. Instead, his voice sounded more and more strained, with even a hint of desperation: “Six, five, four...” he was counting down the number of nails.

“Three!”

When he said that, Marcie only had one extended nail left. The seemingly endless forest finally stopped at a river. There were a few ripples in the river, and it was sprinkled with the reflection of a few golden sun rays.

As she looked at the river, Marcie saw the reflection of her own bloodied face with her slightly sinister smile. She managed to protect her last remaining nail. No matter how vicious the previous attacks were, Chen Jinfeng could no longer continue counting.

“I’ve found you at last...”

Just as she said that, someone rose up from the surface of the idyllic river, and water spewed everywhere. The person jumped out and ran in the opposite direction.

“So you do get scared.” Marcie sneered. She had never felt this much energy coursing through her body...

Under the dazzling azure sky, a woman covered in blood leaped into the air as her prey scrambled on the ground. For a moment, it was as if everything froze in a picture perfect scene.

Chen Jinfeng felt a sharp burning pain shoot through his back and saw a glimpse of a drop of his blood. Just when he screamed: “No—“

The sunlight disappeared. The blue sky disappeared. The grass, the forest, the river, everything blurred and gradually faded from his sight.

Once again the poorly-lit building in the factory compound reappeared.

The scathing hot air surrounded him, each agonizing breath was like self-torture. Even before he could feel the pain from his skin which came in direct contact with the ground, he could see white smoke accompanied with the smell of burnt flesh.

[So this is how it feels to be a person without a heat resistance adaptation?]

Chen Jinfeng gasped violently like a fish out of the water. He felt as if his insides were disintegrating. Without warning, he felt a foot pressing down heavily on his throat.

“Here, we meet once again.” Marcie lowered her head, peering down at him. Even though she was covered with cuts from head to toe, she looked serene. “But, I really don’t wish to see you again...”

“No. No... Please... Please!”

Marcie had no reason to spare him. Her remaining sharp nail easily pierced through Chen Jinfeng’s forehead just as if it were tofu.

Chapter 64: Mini Explosions & a Sob Story

“Lucky.”

The same word was said at the same time by two different people at two different locations. One of them was Hu Changzai who was facing Hai Tianqing, the other was Fang Dan who was facing the yuppie.

3:02 am, northeastern corner of Oasis.

“Twerp, you think you’re lucky?” A blue vein on Hai Tianqing’s forehead starting throbbing, while he held an axe. The blood vessels on the back of his hand also started bulging. He spat so hard on the floor that his spittle hit the ground like a bullet, to the extent that it raised a small cloud of dust. “Let’s see if you still think so in five minutes,” he threatened as he looked down at Hu Changzai contemptuously.

Hu Changzai pushed up his spectacles, pretending that he was calm but he took two steps backward. His neck felt a little numb because he had to look upwards to see Hai Tianqing’s face — this was his first time standing so close to someone of that stature. [Can someone with such an enormous frame still be considered a human?]

Hu Changzai wasn’t considered tall by any means, but he was at least 1.78m. Despite that, when he stood in front of Hai Tianqing, the top of his head barely reached his opponent’s waist. That man’s shoulders were so wide that it was thrice the length of Hu Changzai’s, and the rippling muscles of his neck and back resembled a small mountain. At first glance, it was obvious that the man possessed an incredible amount of physical strength.

Even that axe in Hai Tianqing’s hand was a marvel as it was the same height as Hu Changzai. Hu Changzai wondered how Hai

Tianqing even managed to find something like that.

“Well... Executive Hai,” Hu Changzai called Hai Tianqing by his title, unable to immediately change his habit. “To be honest, I still haven’t developed any physical enhancements,” Hu Changzai confessed.

The man in front of him, who resembled a small mountain, fell silent for a second. “What? You’re telling me that your physique is still that of a normal person?” Hai Tianqing said in astonishment as he planted his large face beside Hu Changzai.

Hu Changzai nodded grudgingly.

“So, you are planning to just surrender?” Hai Tianqing thought of this possibility.

“I can’t. If I get captured, it would be troublesome for the others.”

Hai Tianqing straightened his back, “Alright. Don’t blame me for being merciless since you chose to side with those traitors of humankind.” He lifted the axe and asked, “Do you have any last words?”

Hu Changzai shook his head, he could feel his calves trembling. As he watched the axe being raised higher and higher, he clenched his teeth and rushed head first toward Hai Tianqing’s waist. Hai Tianqing didn’t even raise a brow. With his left hand, he grabbed Hu Changzai’s neck and lifted him off the ground.

Hu Changzai kicked his legs as he hung in mid-air. He could literally feel the oxygen being squeezed out from him. His face turned purple in less than two seconds. He continued struggling, feeling his consciousness slowly fading. He tried to pull himself away by grabbing on to Hai Tianqing’s muscular wrist — however, that bit of resistance, was but a drop in the bucket, it felt like nothing to Hai Tianqing.

A puzzled look appeared on Hai Tianqing’s face, this was most

likely because he could not understand why Hu Changzai would even bother struggling at this point. Just then, he heard the young man, who he held like a small sparrow in his hand, mumbling something. He could not hear him clearly.

“What?”

“You lied yesterday,” Hu Changzai said weakly through his gritted teeth.

Before Hai Tianqing could react, he felt as if there was something within his left wrist. A visible bump appeared under the skin of his arm, and it moved toward his shoulder following his blood flow.

Hai Tianqing quickly threw down his axe and tried to stop the lump using his right hand. “BOOM!”

The bump moved too quickly for him, as he tried to press down on it, the area near his left shoulder was torn open by a small explosion. Blood, flesh, skin, and pieces of tendons flew outwards with the sound of an explosion creating a rain of blood. Blood splattered all over Hu Changzai.

Hai Tianqing’s entire left arm was now deformed. He sat on the ground and managed to painfully utter a question. He was not concerned about his wound, nor the weird bump. Instead, he asked: “How did you know about that lie?”

Hu Changzai fell to the ground. He coughed a few times feebly, he could still feel his lungs burning with pain. “I don’t know what you lied about. But from the looks of your wounds, that must be quite a big lie.”

Hu Changzai’s ability: 【Truth Bomb】

Introduction: After Hu Changzai’s Lie Detection ability advanced, he can now detect if anyone has lied in the past 24 hours. Once it is confirmed that the target has lied in the past 24 hours, Hu Changzai can plant a Truth bomb through skin contact. The greater the gravity of the lie and the shorter the time passed,

the more powerful the explosion of the Truth Bomb would be. The Truth Bomb would travel to the target's heart but would explode on the spot if something interfered with it.

Hai Tianqing's wound was relatively close to his heart. He breathed heavily and grinned mockingly at himself. "Who would have known? I thought that I was quite good at combat, but I was defeated so quickly by a person like you. I underestimated you. Will I... die?"

Hu Changzai could not tell. Even though he survived alone for some time before he reached Oasis, he had never killed anyone. If Hai Tianqing really died, that man would be the first living person he had murdered... When he thought of this, Hu Changzai expression worsened. He caught his breath and managed to stand, planning to just walk away.

"Ha!" Hai Tianqing exclaimed abruptly when he saw Hu Changzai turning his back to him, he covered his own eyes with his uninjured arm.

"I can't believe it... I'm going to die like this without a chance to take revenge..." he mumbled softly to himself, "and by the hands of this traitor of humankind..."

Hu Changzai paused and turned his head. His face was still slightly purplish from the lack of oxygen, "I'm just curious. What did you lie about yesterday?"

3:02 am, Oasis (west).

Fang Dan didn't say a single word as she looked at the man in front of her. It wasn't because she had nothing to say, but she couldn't speak and couldn't move because the yuppie was too close to her.

She could feel the man's warm breath by the side of her ear. The yuppie held a lock of long black hair between his fingers. "You're Fang Dan, right?" he sounded indifferent as he said this. "From the

information we have on you, you arrived very early at Oasis. Even though you are a natural posthuman, you don't have any outstanding abilities. Neither do you have any physical enhancements."

Fang Dan bit her lips as she tried her best to keep her legs from growing weak. The yuppie was one of the five Executives after all. He appeared to be narcissistic and unscrupulous. She could feel her blood rushing as she sensed the threatening aura he exuded.

The yuppie sashayed toward her again. Just as Fang Dan reacted, she received a violent blow to her stomach. It felt as if she was rammed by a car. The impact threw her backward by four to five meters, and she landed heavily on the ground.

The man did not follow up with an attack even after a few seconds had passed. Fang Dan was also unable to sit up. She felt as if she might have a hernia. She tried to open her mouth, but it was as if something in her abdominal cavity had been damaged, so she couldn't even make a sound.

"Huh? I didn't expect that you really didn't develop any physical enhancements." The yuppie seemed genuinely a little surprised. Following which, he shrugged showing his slight boredom. "This is too easy. How pointless. Um, should I let you live?" He circled Fang Dan twice as she laid on the ground like a dead fish. "Nay. You are too dirty. I will get dirty if I carry you back..."

[He would kill someone for that reason?] Fang Dan winced with a contorted expression. She wanted to move badly. She wanted to run away, but her body was just like a rag. She couldn't even muster a bit of energy.

The yuppie hummed an unknown tune and kicked Fang Dan's stomach violently without warning. Fang Dan, who initially thought that she couldn't make another sound, let out a soft groan.

"Since you are going to die, you can be the guinea pig for me to try out my ability!"

The yuppie's face suddenly lit up with excitement and anticipation under the darkness. He nudged Fang Dan's head with the tip of his foot and saw that her eyes were opened and that they were still moving. With that, he chuckled, "Good. As long as you can hear me."

"God is really unfair. There are people like you who don't even have the basic physical enhancements. Then, there is me. I just gained a new ability yesterday..." The yuppie straightened up his vest and stuffed his hands in his pockets. "Activate 【Third-rate Author】," he said with a lowered voice.

The yuppie's new ability: 【Third-rate Author】

Introduction: To gain readers, one's story must at least have a consistent logic. This is the fundamental standard that every third-rate author should have for themselves, unlike N.Heller [1] who doesn't have a bottom line. Using the target as your protagonist, make up a short story about him or her. If the story follows a proper logic and is accepted by the people involved, the target will end up like the protagonist at the end of the story.

"Let me try this." The yuppie half-closed his eyes as he stared at the woman at his feet, who had curled up on the ground.

"After you graduated from college, you met a handsome, young superior at your workplace. That's me. After both of you dated for some time, you found out that he actually had another girlfriend overseas. You felt that you were cheated, so you resigned from your job in a rage and hid yourself. However, you did not expect that the girlfriend was just a woman that his family chose, and he still loves you deeply... He found you and cleared up the misunderstanding. Thus, both of you fell in love again."

Even though it was nearly impossible that such a rubbish, cliché story would happen in real life, tears suddenly welled up in Fang Dan's eyes. She opened her mouth and muttered in wretched happiness, "I know, I know... Our relationship must be real..."

The yuppie was stunned for a moment and stared at Fang Dan. Shortly after, he laughed out loudly: “Haha! This is fun! This is fun!”

He waved his hand and decided to change the direction of the story. Fang Dan’s expression reverted back to normal. She felt her ears turning red and then her entire face. She was not embarrassed, but rather she was extremely angry. “Just kill me... don’t toy with my emotions!” Fang Dan said in a coarse voice.

The yuppie ignored her and continued.

“You were finally taking the last step toward marriage with the boyfriend you have loved for seven years. Your new house was ready, and you were preparing for the wedding. You felt very blessed. After all, you have gone through a lot together with him, and now, what you longed for was just within your reach...”

Fang Dan’s anger dissipated. She looked at the yuppie with an indescribable expression. The latter was thoroughly enjoying himself, entertained by his new ability. He merely glanced once at her and did not stop.

“But at that moment, your boyfriend told you that he fell in love with another woman. He begged you to let him go. For a long time, you tried to make him stay. You pestered him, you begged him, and you even threatened to kill yourself. Despite whatever methods you used, he still left you for another woman. But then, you realized that you were pregnant.

“You hesitated for a long time, but you decided to keep the child... the child was innocent after all. And if you thought about it carefully, the child’s father couldn’t do anything about it. It wasn’t his fault for falling in love with another woman. Who could control love? You kept the child for nine months and even engaged a great gynecologist. But in the end...”

The yuppie edged toward Fang Dan, and his voice grew cold.

“Your child was stillborn. You held your child and commit suicide by jumping off a building.”

Everything fell silent. The man and woman looking at each other did not say a word. They could only hear the howling night wind sweeping up the yellow clouds of sand.

The more detailed the story was, the more powerful its effect. The yuppie watched the expressionless face of the woman in front of him, his smile grew wider...

All of a sudden, just like a magic trick, the yuppie's body was flung up into the air.

“Splat!”

He fell to the ground sprawled out in an odd position like a splattered watermelon. His arms and legs were contorted, and blood slowly seeped out from the side of his mouth.

Fang Dan struggled for awhile and managed to stand up. Their roles had been reversed. She narrowed her eyes and looked at the yuppie. He was in a terrible condition, just like he fell off a building. “You really don't understand women,” she whispered.

“Why... Why... This shouldn't happen...” The yuppie coughed and spat out a mouthful of blood. That sort of woman should exist in reality, right?

Fang Dan smiled coldly, she seemed to have understood his thoughts. “Idiot.” Her brow furrowed and she looked disgusted. “The first half of the story did really happen to me.”

The yuppie's eyes widened.

“After my boyfriend cheated on me, I found out that I was pregnant. Do you know what I did? When I was three months pregnant, I chose an illegal abortion clinic. I got an abortion and placed the dead fetus into a box. Then, I sent that box to them as their wedding gift. Of course, I was mentally unstable then. After that, I went to visit a psychiatrist.”

The yuppie's arms trembled, he was unable to speak.

“I really hate conceited men.” Fang Dan followed what the yuppie did and nudge the man's head with the tip of her foot. “From your current condition, your ability can backfire on you, right? When a storyline is not logical and doesn't fit the target, you will end up like the protagonist instead. This is indeed a third-rate ability.”

The man on the ground could no longer hear her. A puddle of blood slowly extended outward from his motionless body.

TN: [1] The author of this web novel, by the way!

Chapter 65: I'm Sorry for Having a Useless Ability

“What the hell? Ahhhhhh...”

A black shadow circled the Executives' Building, it disappeared in a second, leaving a yellow trail of dust. This was followed tightly by two other figures, one who was visibly smaller. After a few seconds, the three shadows re-enacted the same scenario, going around the building once again.

“Enough of your bullsh*t. Stop and let me bite you to death right now!” an angry soprano voice rang behind Lin Sanjiu. It was the brown rabbit who was almost half-soaring in the sky because of its speed.

“You must be joking. Ahhhhhh... Didn't they say there were five Executives. How can a rabbit be an Executive? Ahhhh... If there was a vacancy, why didn't you people in Oasis inform me...”

There was no way Lin Sanjiu would stop, though she knew her protests did nothing but made the brown rabbit angrier. Lin Sanjiu did not dare to run elsewhere with these two Executives chasing her as she was afraid that she might accidentally lead them to her companions and implicate them. Without a choice, she could only run in circles around the Executives' Building. The three, uh... people have already run for who knows how many rounds.

“Gah,” the OL muttered as she paused and turned in the other direction, deciding to catch Lin Sanjiu by running in the opposite direction. When the brown rabbit saw her moving, he suddenly grew impatient and shouted at the OL: “F*ck, you're doing that again...”

Before he finished his sentence, a person jumped over his body while he was in a daze. Lin Sanjiu landed behind the rabbit, and she continued forward without stopping. Once again, all of them

were running in the same direction but with a slight change in position. By then, Lin Sanjiu was already very familiar with the whole shenanigan. Apparently, she had jumped over the rabbit a couple of times over the past few rounds. The brown rabbit's black eyes were almost turning red with fury, he screamed, "Stop changing directions! She just jumped over my head again! Curses!"

The OL's spectacles were tinted with a cold light in the dark. "It's all because you are so small, and you can't block her. You're useless!" she said ruthlessly.

"I'll bite you to death!" The brown rabbit's eyes had already turned into two red inverted triangles. The OL ignored him. Even though she tried to run faster, there was no sign that they were closing the distance between themselves and Lin Sanjiu.

Sprinting was all down to one's physical capabilities. Despite normal "Physical Enhancement" and Lin Sanjiu's "Overall Physical Enhancement" both being passive abilities, they were of a different class just like a burger set compared to a deluxe family Christmas meal...

Other than the two people chasing her, most of the other posthumans would develop the normal "burger set".

Seeing the woman in front of him running away with ease, the brown rabbit could not tolerate it any longer. Its four paws stopped, and it yelled out dispiritedly: "[Startled monkeys, Fleeing Hares!](#)"

[What a cultured rabbit!] Before that thought fully popped up in Lin Sanjiu's mind, a turf of brown ball suddenly shot toward her back, like a projectile from a rocket launcher and hit her. The forward inertia combined with the rabbit's natural strength knocked Lin Sanjiu, who was still sprinting, to the ground.

The OL chased up to them within a few seconds and blocked Lin Sanjiu's path. Right now, it looked like it wasn't feasible for her to just stand up and leap over the rabbit. Lin Sanjiu stood up and

dusted herself. “You’re quite chubby,” she complimented, looking at the brown rabbit.

“I’m going to kill you!”

As the rabbit screeched, Lin Sanjiu didn’t have an easy time evading the raining attacks from the rabbit. Due to the reflection on the OL’s spectacles, it was difficult to see what her expression was. Her outstretched arms were quickly turning a glowing red. The heat which radiated from her arms started distorting the surrounding air.

Lin Sanjiu’s expression turned stiff. She knew that she would turn into a burning corpse if she touched those arms. However, the process was not over. A red glow with a tinge of white spread from the OL’s shoulders to her chest and waist. Soon, the entire top half of her body became white. When a draft of wind blew over her body, even the sand carried by the wind burst into flames falling to the ground like tiny “comets”, leaving a few burnt marks on the ground.

【A Scorching Embrace】

Introduction: The user’s upper body can reach an intimidating temperature of 260°C. This temperature is enough for the combustion of almost all material. For the exact list of materials, please check the common melting points of the various elements.

Though the weakness of the ability was clearly the user’s legs, Lin Sanjiu could not get close to her opponent’s lower body at the moment. This was because the OL was much shorter than her. She guessed that the OL was about only 1.52m.

“This isn’t fair!” Being unable to do much, she turned and continued to run. This time she couldn’t be bothered if she might meet another of her companions. After all, the combat noises and explosions at the various corners of Oasis had already stopped.

Even though she did not know what the outcome of the battles

was, she could at least cause some confusion if things weren't looking good.

“No matter what, my Potential Growth Value is very high! Why do both of you have such killer moves and I have nothing?” Lin Sanjiu grumbled softly, and naturally, no one replied.

Before she could run far, the brown rabbit whose speed increased incredibly after yelling out “Startled monkeys, Fleeing Hares” quickly caught up to her. Using the same tactic, he and the OL cornered her again. Without saying a word, the OL leaped and headed toward Lin Sanjiu. Lin Sanjiu did not dare to even let the woman get close to her, she immediately shrunk backward and dodged her.

At the same time, she heard the rabbit shouting, “[Wily hare's Three Burrows!](#)” Before Lin Sanjiu could react, she felt two rabbit feet land on her shoulders. It felt as if she was hit by a blast wave. In the next second, a fountain of blood and flesh spurted out from the hole in her shoulder, dyeing the floor red.

“If I use this ability, I can create burrows in your body!” the brown rabbit laughed as it prepared to pounce on her again. Lin Sanjiu looked down at her wound and slowly lifted her head. Somehow, the expression on her face made the rabbit trembled for a second.

Lin Sanjiu swung her left hand as if she didn't feel any pain. She held a long knife horizontally in her hand. Then, she bent over and thrust her knife toward the rabbit like a hungry wolf. The brown rabbit was shocked. He rolled aside and flipped his long ears to one side. Thus, barely dodging the blade that just scraped the tip of his head.

After she missed her target, Lin Sanjiu did not immediately jump up and chase after the rabbit. Instead, she let herself fall to the ground. She did not even turn back to look but threw out a card from her hand toward her back. Right behind Lin Sanjiu was the

OL who was trying to follow up with an attack.

When the OL noticed the card, it was too late for her to defend herself. The card was reaching her knee. Suddenly, the card changed into a long nail which pierced through the OL's knee. The woman howled. Her body swayed before she fell to the ground. The brilliant glow on her upper body immediately vanished.

【Marcie's nails】

This is one of Marcie's fresh nail. Even though it still possesses the "A laundry bar soap will turn dirty itself" effect, it can only last independently for ten minutes away from the owner's body.

Without her abilities, the OL was just a struggling piece of flesh. Lin Sanjiu knocked her unconscious with just two punches. The entire series of events only lasted for five seconds. The brown rabbit watched blankly the entire time, unable to react.

Even when his opponent raised her knife, her target was the OL all along. He could tell that she had never received any sort of combat training, yet her movements were very accurate. It was as if she had eyes at the back of her head...

Before his chain of thoughts ended, the rabbit found that he was looking down from a high viewpoint. This was followed by a shot of pain from his ears. He knew that he was being lifted.

"Braise or barbecue?" Lin Sanjiu grinned coldly as she held the rabbit by his ears.

The brown rabbit trembled. As he was in mid-air, his tiny rabbit feet could not reach Lin Sanjiu. Even if he had that "Wily hare's Three Burrows" ability, it was useless if he could not touch her. He knew that he was at a great disadvantage, so he decided to use his last resort.

The face in front of Lin Sanjiu was clearly a rabbit covered in soft fur, yet she could almost tell that he was sneering. The brown rabbit opened its mouth and muttered, "All the carrots are mine!"

【All the carrots are mine】

Introduction: The user will steal the strongest combat-type ability that his opponent possesses and be able to use it exclusively for five minutes. After 5 minutes, “All the carrots are mine!” will enter a cooldown state. During the cooldown period, the user cannot use any idioms with the word “hare”.

“Hahaha! How stupid! Your most powerful combat skill is with me now!” the brown rabbit immediately mocked when he felt a familiar warm flowing in his body. “Let me see... Huh? What’s this?” The rabbit looked at his paw and saw a Diary Card. Without even testing it out, he knew it was useless.

Lin Sanjiu gazed back at him expressionlessly.

The brown rabbit didn’t know why but he felt a little nervous suddenly. “Wait. Please wait... Ah, a police baton!”

The rabbit gripped the police baton with its paw. “Bzzt.” the police baton made a sound and ran out of batteries.

“And... and this! This nail. This was what you used just now...”

The card with Marcie’s nail suddenly turned to smoke with a “Pssh” — It had reached the ten minutes limit.

“Had enough fun?” Lin Sanjiu stared at the rabbit grimly.

The brown rabbit finally broke down: “How is this possible? How can this be your primary combat skills? How were you able to survive till today? I don’t believe this. You must have some hidden secret ability!”

The corner of Lin Sanjiu’s mouth curled. “I only have a single active skill, and it is that useless. Sorry. But I haven’t eaten barbecued meat for a long time, so I am more inclined toward that. What about you?”

If rabbits had tear ducts, the rabbit would have been crying right now. “Forget it, just let him go,” a familiar voice came from behind

them. There were two people standing behind her. The person who just spoke was Griselda, and Xu Xiaoyang was standing behind her.

“Are you also here to fight?” Lin Sanjiu continued holding the rabbit as she asked emotionlessly. The cooldown period for her Pygmalion Choker was already over, and she still haven’t use it. She could threaten the rabbit in her hand to describe an ability for her... She had a chance!

Surprisingly, Xu Xiaoyang shook her head. “No... I am not here to fight with you. I know that you are not a traitor. The matter with the duoluozhongs was not you or your friends’ fault. I just have a request that I hope you can accept.”

For a moment, nobody spoke. They could only hear the never-ending howls of the wind. The glow from the tiny little “comets” left behind by the OL lit the faces of the few people.

“I’ll hear you out.”

The name of the ability is a Chinese idiom which roughly translates as an adjective to describe someone running away at great speed.

Another Chinese idiom which roughly translates to have many backup plans.

Chapter 66: You're an Idiot

Marcie could see a small hill-shaped figure moving toward her in the dark. She immediately paused as she observed it cautiously. It was slowly edging forward. The figure was very large, but it was extremely slow. Marcie placed her medical kit down and crossed her arms.

After she waited for some time, the large shadow finally got closer and revealed its true form. When Marcie got a clear view of what it was, she raised one of her brows. “What are you doing?”

The person that approached her was actually Hu Changzai. He was pulling on a rope (god knows how he got it) propped on his shoulder, and an unconscious Hai Tianqing was secured on the other end of the rope. He struggled with each step as he continued dragging that man behind him. The scene was like a chick trying to drag a camel. Hu Changzai was exhausted. He panted heavily, and he could almost feel his eyes popping out. “Huff... Ah... Help... Help me...”

When he looked up, he was instead astounded, “Marcie, how did you end up like this?”

There wasn't a single part of her body that was unhurt, it was either bandaged or covered with ointment. He almost couldn't tell what her original skin color was. Marcie sighed in resignation, “I received too many cuts just now, so I went to the infirmary to treat my wounds first. I also took some items that I think will be useful. Don't worry, they're all superficial wounds... But you... I killed Chen Jinfeng but what are you doing, dragging your opponent around like that?”

Hu Changzai spotted the medical kit and immediately lay on the ground with a “plop”. He waved his arms and said, “Tend... tend to his wounds first... he's on our side... I'll tell you more... more details later. Let me catch my breath...”

Since he said that, Marcie took out a bottle of rubbing alcohol and a set of thread and needle. She dealt with Hai Tianqing's wounds quickly and fed him some antibiotics. After all that, she wiped her hands with a cotton cloth and mumbled self-deprecatingly, "Since I came to Oasis, I'm almost becoming a doctor... Alright, he can sleep here. Whether he survives is up to him."

Anyway, with Hai Tianqing's body frame, it was difficult to move him anywhere else, so Hu Changzai nodded. Just then, they heard a cough not far from them and a quiet voice: "Is that you Marcie?" Both of them looked up and saw a person stumbling toward them, it was Fang Dan.

Fang Dan's body was covered with large patches of bruises. She didn't have many open wounds, but she looked rather sickly. "Great, I finally found you both—" Before she could finish her sentence, she nearly fell to the ground. Hu Changzai realized and quickly helped her up while Marcie immediately checked Fang Dan's injuries.

"You have at least three broken ribs! How can you still move around? It's too dangerous... what about your opponent?" Marcie exclaimed.

Fang Dan managed a weak but proud smile, "Since I'm alive, he's definitely dead."

With that, she turned and spotted Hai Tianqing and was shocked, "Ah! But why?"

After Hu Changzai explained the situation hurriedly, Fang Dan looked at him skeptically but did not say anything else. Marcie provided Fang Dan some first aid treatment. Seeing that Fang Dan should not move in her current condition, Hu Changzai and Marcie helped her over and let her rest beside Hai Tianqing.

"We'll go and see how Xiao Jiu is and return shortly. Even though there is no one outside now, you better hide beside

Executive Hai for now...” Marcie said softly.

Fang Dan nodded and leaned on one of Hai Tianqing’s arm which was as almost as thick as the trunk of a small tree. She gradually relaxed. After seeing Fang Dan closing her eyes, Marcie and Hu Changzai sped for the Executives’ Building without delay.

“Who’d have guessed? I didn’t know Fang Dan was... was so powerful! I wonder what’s her ability,” Hu Changzai commented between breaths as he tried to keep up with Marcie’s speed.

Marcie paused for a second and turned to look at him curiously. “I don’t know. Haven’t you two been here in Oasis for a long time? I thought you knew...”

Hu Changzai didn’t know how to respond, but he did not take it to heart. He thought to himself that when Fang Dan was feeling better, they still had plenty of chance to ask her. After running at that speed for one minute, they could see the Executives’ Building just ahead. By then, the dust that they had stirred from the ground had attracted the attention of the people standing at the Executives’ Building.

“One, two, three... That’s weird. Why are there three people standing in front of Xiao Jiu? There is also something in Xiao Jiu’s hand...” Marcie crooked her head, puzzled.

[What the hell is she holding anyway?] Marcie could see that Lin Sanjiu was facing the three people alone, but Lin Sanjiu did not look nervous. Lin Sanjiu saw Marcie and even waved at her, shouting, “Marcie, Hu Changzai, come here!”

With a trail of dust behind her, Marcie stopped beside Lin Sanjiu, unable to comprehend the current situation. She looked at the three people. There was a girl with braids and an attractive woman, and she remembered that she had seen them once. The last person was a middle-aged woman with cropped hair and was wearing a white coat. Marcie had no idea who that woman was and realized that she had never seen her before.

After some considerations, Marcie asked the question that she was most concerned about: “Where did you catch that rabbit? Can we eat it?” She couldn’t be blamed for that since it was a question prompted by the fact that she had not eaten fresh meat in 28 months.

“I’m not your goddamn food! You sh*tty f*cker!” even though his ears were still firmly in Lin Sanjiu’s grip, the brown rabbit regained its former vulgar tone after he was reassured by the presence of his allies (Xu Xiaoyang’s group). “Don’t stare at me! Get away from me!”

“What... what’s the matter?” Marcie asked, flabbergasted. This was also the first time Marcie had seen a talking rabbit. As if she suddenly remembered the others, she added, “Who are they?”

While they were talking, Hu Changzai ran toward them, breathlessly. Lin Sanjiu did not answer Marcie but instead asked in a serious tone, “Is everyone alright? What happened to the other three Executives?”

The people in Xu Xiaoyang’s group immediately showed interest when they heard her question.

“Other than Hai Tianqing, the other two are dead.” Marcie tilted her chin upward as she tossed a sideward glance the three people, whose purpose were unknown to her. After seeing their expressions changed, she continued softly, “Fang Dan’s injuries are quite serious. She is resting with Hai Tianqing now.”

When Hu Changzai noticed Lin Sanjiu’s slightly perturbed expression, and he quickly interjected, “I’ll explain it to you later... What about you, Xiao Jiu? Aren’t there two more Executives?”

“Well, one of them is here...” Lin Sanjiu lifted up her arm and shook the rabbit, “Hey, say hello.”

The rabbit scowled and kept quiet.

“So the rumored Mr. Rabbit Executive is really a rabbit!?” Hu

Changzai said in shock.

“As for the other Executive, she is unconscious.” Lin Sanjiu shrugged as the two people looked at her with astonishment.

Before Marcie and Hu Changzai could respond, Xu Xiaoyang gasped in disbelief, “I don’t understand how you all could defeat the Executives. With the few of you, and some of you still haven’t developed physical enhancements...”

“Uh, that’s right,” As if Xu Xiaoyang’s comment finally reminded Lin Sanjiu about their purpose of gathering, she jutting her chin at Xu Xiaoyang and said, “Team Leader Xu said that she has a request. Since all of you are here, let’s hear her out.”

When Xu Xiaoyang heard her, she lowered her eyelids, showing a dispirited expression. At that moment, she did not look like a child at all. She looked at the middle-age woman beside her for a moment and tugged the corner of the woman’s shirt. She couldn’t help sighing as she said, “I hope... you won’t hurt my mom.”

“Your mom?”

Xu Xiaoyang nodded as her French braids slid to the side of her cheeks, “I am Professor Bai’s daughter.”

All of them immediately looked at the middle-aged woman. Xu Xiaoyang’s voice was now so soft that it was barely audible, “My mom is also one of the people who ate the medicine which provides Heat Resistance Adaptation. She has zero Potential Growth Value, so she doesn’t have any other abilities. But if all of you intend to hurt her, even if I’ll die, I’ll—”

“So, she is Professor Bai?” Lin Sanjiu interrupted just as Xu Xiaoyang was about to show her resolve, “Actually, we had no idea who Professor Bai is... If you didn’t say that just now, I would have just let her go.”

Xu Xiaoyang lifted her head, as regret filled her face

“Since we know this now, I am not going to just let her leave like

this. At least, she needs to explain everything.” Lin Sanjiu nodded at Xu Xiaoyang slightly apologetically, as she turned to ask, “Why are you rearing duoluozhongs here?”

Xu Xiaoyang was startled by the question and wanted to say something; however, Professor Bai patted her daughter’s shoulder, indicating that she shouldn’t. The rabbit in Lin Sanjiu’s hand froze for a moment before he sneered, “What rubbish are you talking about —”

“When I chose this path, I knew I’d be alone,” the middle-aged woman interrupted the rabbit. The brown rabbit could only look at her in a daze.

Professor Bai cast her eyes at the dormitories and looked at them for a moment before she continued, “Yesterday, it was the first time that some of the kids around Xiaoyang’s age entered the greenhouse.”

Lin Sanjiu was unsure what the woman meant.

“They were starting on Biology, so the teachers brought them to the greenhouse to plant some carrots. Tomorrow, next week... After they wait for a while, they’ll see the carrots grow... just like these children.”

Professor Bai smiled faintly as a few wrinkles appeared at the side of her mouth. Then, she turned to look around. “There are currently 1600 people living in those five buildings. There are men and women, most of them are young and vibrant. They still have many years ahead of them... And Oasis is a great model to start rebuilding a civilization again. These people are the future hope for mankind.”

Professor Bai inhaled deeply, and a gentle smile appeared on her face, “To protect this hope, for mankind’s survival, I will continue down this dark path. I won’t complain.”

Hu Changzai was stunned, he looked to his companions and

nodded. “She is saying all these from the bottom of her heart,” he concluded quietly.

“What... what does this have to do with the duoluozhongs?”

Professor Bai looked at them each, “What if I tell you that Oasis could reach such a scale all because of the duoluozhongs?”

Lin Sanjiu’s group and that one rabbit were shocked and dumbfounded.

“Why would people evolve? This has bothered me for a long time. Does this mean that Posthumans are better than normal people? Does it mean they deserve to survive? But that shouldn’t be the case... Posthumans only make up a very small population. The people who truly need to live and survive are those 1600 normal people. Whatever I’m doing is just to sacrifice a few lives to save the majority.”

Xu Xiaoyang pursed her lips tightly and lowered her head.

“I’m quite ashamed to say this, but most of the technology used to save the people here in Oasis wasn’t my creation. A duoluozhong shared with me the technology to produce heat resistant crops, he gave me the medicine for the heat resistance adaptation and also the methods to get water... And what the duoluozhong and his companions needed were just a few natural Posthumans.

“Apparently, duoluozhongs need to evolve as well. And they do this by consuming Posthumans,” the woman continued in a mild tone, her gentle smile showed some resignation. However, there was a glint of insanity in her eyes which was getting obvious by the minute.

After some time, someone finally spoke.

“You mean... you used Oasis’s living conditions as bait to attract natural Posthumans. Then, you treated them like what you did to us? You sent them to the duoluozhongs! You sent them to their deaths?” Lin Sanjiu sounded crestfallen as she said this.

“The details were always arranged by Executive Chen. So, all of you actually came back from one of those missions...” Professor Bai nodded before she said sincerely, “On behalf of all the members of Oasis, I am truly grateful for each and every Posthumans’ sacrifice.”

Lin Sanjiu had been looking downwards all this time. Suddenly, she erupted, “You idiotic woman!” She clenched her fist and went in for a punch.

At the same time, Fang Dan, who had been lying beside Hai Tianqing, suddenly moved. She seemed to have heard a noise, so she slowly opened her eyes. Under the night sky, she saw a person walking toward her. “It’s you. I knew you’d be alright. Is everything going well?” she asked with a smile on her face.

Chapter 67: Good Evening! Dear Members!

Before Lin Sanjiu's fist reached Professor Bai, one of Griselda's arms rapidly swelled up. Without saying a word, Griselda stepped forward and swept her arm toward Lin Sanjiu. Lin Sanjiu flipped backward and evaded that attack. She immediately stared back at Griselda coldly.

The brown rabbit in her hands was almost driven mad with anger, "If you want to die, don't bring me with you! Let me down!"

Lin Sanjiu ignored him. Her heaving chest and her popped veins were more than enough proof that she was incensed.

Xu Xiaoyang's expression was not any better, "I've already warned you! If you dare to hurt my mom, I won't hold back—"

"Are you crazy?" Lin Sanjiu did not turn to look at Xu Xiaoyang. "Who knows how many Posthumans you've killed! Just for them to live another 14 months?!" Lin Sanjiu hollered as she continued staring at Professor Bai.

"What do you mean?" Professor Bai looked back at Lin Sanjiu, not knowing whether to laugh or cry, it was as if she was looking at a kid throwing a tantrum. "I've already told you. I want to help these people so that they can repopulate the world and rebuild civilization!"

"My mom might let you down, but she did this for the greater good..." Xu Xiaoyang retorted furiously. Her small face was flushed with anger when she saw how rude Lin Sanjiu was to her mom.

Lin Sanjiu paused for a moment as if she suddenly realized something. She instantly exchanged glances with Marcie, and they became visibly appalled.

If she thought about it carefully, she had never heard anyone mentioned it before during their time in Oasis...

She looked at Hu Changzai's perplexed face. Lin Sanjiu lifted the

rabbit in her hand and asked hoarsely, “Hu Changzai, Rabbit, I have a question for you both. Do you know anything about ‘the random die’ and the next world?”

There was pure silence for a few seconds. Lin Sanjiu already knew their answers from the looks on their faces, even without them replying. Marcie covered her face as she gave a long sigh. Noticing the unusual reaction of the two women, Hu Changzai felt anxious as he sensed that there was something wrong. “What do you mean by the next world? Please explain it clearly to us!”

Professor Bai also raised her eyebrows slightly.

“Oh God!” Lin Sanjiu felt a bitter taste in her mouth. She really didn’t know how to put it in words, “Posthumans can only stay in a single world for 14 months. After 14 months, you will be randomly sent to another world... It will still be an apocalyptic world and it will only be worse.”

All the other people, other than Marcie, gave her a “you’re crazy” look.

“She’s telling the truth,” Marcie said solemnly as she stepped forward. “I came from another world... In my original world, a deadly virus was accidentally released from a lab. As it was airborne, about 95% of the human population was wiped out before the experts developed an antiviral serum.”

A crack finally appeared on Professor Bai’s calm and tranquil face. She gasped at Marcie and mumbled, “I... I don’t understand... How is this possible...”

Hu Changzai sat down on the ground with a thud and smiled bitterly as he muttered to him, “She’s telling the truth...”

“If I am not wrong, the duoluozhong that ‘helped’ you must be from another world!” Lin Sanjiu said as she shook her head. “If he isn’t from another world, how do you explain why he had those technologies? Whatever he gave you would have brought about a

technological revolution... Didn't you ever suspect anything?"

Professor Bai was in a daze, her face was turning pale as she seemed to have realized something, "Wait... Wait. You mean..."

Lin Sanjiu sighed.

"That's right... Professor Bai. Since you gave those 1600 normal people medicine which caused them to evolve and gain the Heat Resistance Adaptation, they have no choice but to go to another world.

"When I heard Chen Jinfeng talking about Oasis's grand mission. I was simply unconvinced. Now that I think about it, that's because all these people you've gathered here will soon go off to different worlds. They'll all disappear from this place... Even you. Who will remain to populate this world? To rebuild civilization?

"Once these weak people face a new environment, I can guarantee they'll die in a more painful manner than being here. Do you know why? Based on the survival difficulty, our world is merely a D-level world. It's considerably easy to survive here compared to the other worlds!"

"You've been wrong from the start. Posthumans are not just a fraction of the human population, they're the last hope for mankind! And how many of these people have you sent out to die?"

Lin Sanjiu wanted to continue, but Marcie patted her shoulder gently. "Xiao Jiu..."

Only at that moment did she realize that Professor Bai was now sitting on the ground with an ashen face, scared out of her wits due to the revelation. Her lips were trembling, and tears were pouring from the corners of her eyes. Xu Xiaoyang was so affected by this that she hugged her mother and repeated "Mum" over and over again, unable to offer any word of comfort.

"How could this be... He'd never mention anything like that to

me... I always thought that I was doing the right thing..."

Even though Professor Bai knew her methods might be unpleasant, she had always been wholly committed to her mission. Now that she suddenly knew the truth, now that the bubble had burst, she really could not take the blow.

The brown rabbit also gave a look of disbelief, let alone Professor Bai.

Lin Sanjiu held her words back for a while. She finally spoke after she saw the mother and daughter duo stuck in such a shell-shocked stage, "Professor Bai, I know that you must be feeling all sorts of emotions right now, but you have to answer my question. Where can we find that duoluozhong you've been working with?"

Professor Bai continued to sit in a daze as if she didn't hear what Lin Sanjiu said. She fixed her gaze at the dormitories without saying a word. Just when Lin Sanjiu was about to question the woman again, she felt something hot on her thigh. It seemed to be from her pants pocket. She held the rabbit with her other hand and checked her pocket. She pulled out a piece of paper—the visa that she had taken from Voley.

However, it looked nothing like before. All the information had been crossed out with a long dark line, the paper was turning so hot that it was nearly impossible for her to continue holding onto it. A red line of words appeared on the bottom of the paper: "The holder of this visa has died. This visa is no longer valid."

Lin Sanjiu's heart skipped a beat. She turned to look at Marcie instinctively. [12 is dead! Will Marcie disappear? Does this mean that Luther is dead too?]

Unexpectedly, nothing happened to Marcie, she was fine in general. Marcie crooked her head at Lin Sanjiu, looking puzzled, "What's wrong? Is this your delayed reaction?"

"What will happen to you if 12 dies?" Lin Sanjiu managed to force

those words out of her mouth, she'd never felt so afraid before. Not even that time when she was almost eaten by Ren Nan.

"I'll definitely disappear immediately. My existence is dependent on Luther. If his physical body dies, there is no way I can survive." Marcie hesitated for a moment as the wind blew her red hair into her face. "What did you suddenly bring this up?"

Lin Sanjiu continued staring for some time at Marcie nervously, to the extent the Marcie started feeling uneasy. Something suddenly dawned on her, and she slapped her own thigh saying, "I've been deceived!"

Xu Xiaoyang looked up with her tear-filled eyes while Hu Changzai stood up and walked closer to Lin Sanjiu, worriedly.

"This visa was issued to someone else. Why did Voley lie to me?" Lin Sanjiu said furiously, "I'll deal with him when I get back!"

Other than Marcie and herself, this was the first time the others have heard of that sort of visa and were all puzzled. After thinking about it for a while, Lin Sanjiu knew that the matter with Voley could be dealt with later; instead, the bigger problem was the duoluozhong that Professor Bai mentioned.

Suddenly, they heard a resounding "click" from the speakers of the Executives' Building. It was the sound of the microphone being switched on. All of them were stunned as they looked up.

"Good Evening! Dear members of Oasis!"

It was the same male voice which had been making the announcements the entire day. It seemed like it was a new announcement. The voice traveled through Oasis, as the speakers in all the factory compound rang with his voice. They could instantly hear the commotion from the dormitories.

"Hey, what do you all still have to say at this point?" Lin Sanjiu scratched her head and asked impatiently. "You better tell me where is that duoluozhong—"

“All humans, please stay put. I am not referring to you.”

That sentence was like a stop button, everyone froze when they heard that. They all looked up at the speaker, with gaping mouths as they stood still.

“Now, I am going to give you the latest update. All the five Executives have already been defeated. Professor Bai has also found out about the truth regarding this world and understand that the possibility of rebuilding human civilization is but a delusion. If we don’t do anything, we will not be able to keep our farm. Therefore, with a heavy heart, I must say, please ignore all previous rules. Go out there and enjoy the massacre.”

Once the announcement ended, numerous duoluozhong flew out from the top floors of the factory buildings. Their numbers quickly filled the skies. They spread their black carapace-like wings, swung their mouthparts and polluted the air with their terrible stench.

“Please be careful! To prevent the wastage of resources, please do not create large wounds on those humans. The corpses will be collected later...”

Even though they knew that the duoluozhong that misled Professor Bai was upstairs, Lin Sanjiu and the others could not do much. At that moment, the number of duoluozhongs that flew down from the Executives’ Building was twice that of the other buildings. Furthermore, each of those duoluozhongs was staring at them.

Chapter 68: Death of the Utmost Consular Officer

The entire sky was now hidden from view. They could hear the cacophony of their own heavy breaths and their footsteps as they ran as fast as they could between the building with Lin Sanjiu leading the way. Their goal was to reach the vehicles. Once they get their vehicles, they could pick up Fang Dan and Hai Tianqing and escape from Oasis!

From the ground to the sky, the current scenario could be split into three layers.

The top layer was made of many duoluozhongs. They were flying above Lin Sanjiu's group and following them, but they were unable to swoop down and attack the people below as there was a gigantic silver net between them and the humans below.

If they slowed down to look at that net carefully, they would realize that it was made of random paraphernalia: a broken brick, a torn insulation blanket, a ladle from the canteen, a metal grille... They were all junk items, but they all had a silver sheen like the well-polished edge of a katana.

The brown rabbit held on to Lin Sanjiu's combat pants with two paws. His furball-like body bounced in tandem with Lin Sanjiu's pace. He looked up at the gigantic net above them and yelled out, "It's almost ready!"

Without even looking up, Lin Sanjiu snapped her fingers. The items which made up the silver net immediately dispersed, they shot upward toward the duoluozhongs, each leaving a silver trail like those of a meteor streak. The duoluozhongs did not even bat an eye. Their excited screeches became even sharper — they were not afraid of that rubbish! Without the net, it was even easier for all of them!

That common thinking was disproved in half a second. A piece of rag with the hardness of a diamond, rotating at a very high speed, sliced off one of the wings which belonged to a duoluozhong. In shock, it let out a screech before it crashed downward as it lost control. It fell toward a pile of “rubbish”. Its body was instantaneously shredded into bits and explosion of blood and ground flesh erupted in mid-air.

“Fantastic! Do it again!”

While the brown rabbit cheered excitedly, the roof of several of the dormitories broke into pieces, almost a thousand parts, consisting of bricks, tiles, and wood showed a familiar silver sheen and rapidly replaced the gaps in the net.

Marcie was inspired by Chen Jinfeng’s ability when she described this ability to Lin Sanjiu. After Lin Sanjiu’s Pygmalion Choker was activated, she could feel a slight warmth from under the bandages on her neck. Compared to Chen Jinfeng who could only control a limited number of items simultaneously, Lin Sanjiu’s extremely high Potential Growth Value meant that she could control nearly one thousand weaponized items at the same time. That also meant that the lethality of the ability in her hands was far beyond that of Chen Jinfeng.

“I didn’t know you were that powerful...” Xu Xiaoyang was just behind Lin Sanjiu. The girl petite face was now pale, perhaps from all that running or even because she was scared by Lin Sanjiu. Griselda was running beside Xu Xiaoyang, carrying Professor Bai on her back. Professor Bai was dumbfounded as she looked up at the sky.

Lin Sanjiu sighed dejectedly. The disparity between feeling like a superhero for 5 minutes and a weak sh*t for the remaining 1435 minutes within a 24-hour period was really too great, she couldn’t help feeling that it was bad for her heart. As she thought about time, she suddenly asked, “Hu Changzai, how many more minutes do I have?”

Marcie was carrying Hu Changzai on her back as his running speed was really behind everyone. His face was red and flustered as he replied, “You have exactly 4 minutes. We are reaching soon, we can make it in time!”

They could indeed see the empty lot where the vehicles were right ahead. Without 12’s key, they could retrieve two vehicles. Thankfully, Marcie’s bus was large, so they probably had enough space for everyone.

“Huh?”

Once Lin Sanjiu reached her truck, she scanned her surroundings and saw something which stunned her for a moment. The few people running behind her also noticed what she saw. The back of her truck was opened, the door was slightly ajar. There were a few mineral water bottles on the ground and a packet of crushed instant noodle with a footprint on it.

The packet of instant noodle was right in the middle of a puddle of fluid. “Pitter-patter. Pitter-patter.” Drops of blood trickling down from the small gap between the opened doors hit the plastic packaging of the instant noodle.

Lin Sanjiu eyes were glued on the gruesome state of Voley’s corpse for a few seconds before she suddenly covered her mouth. Marcie quickly rushed beside her, and when she saw that sight, her expression changed immediately, “It’s 12!”

From the methods used, it was clear that the murderer was none other than 12. Multiple organs in the body have all been slit open. Lin Sanjiu knew that she didn’t have time to waste so she bore with the wave of nausea and pulled the body off the truck and indicated for Marcie to throw Hu Changzai’s protest. After that, she heaved a sigh. “The visa was issued to Voley, so the Consular Officer must be someone else!”

Even though she came to that conclusion, she knew that this was not the time to think about the matter regarding the Consular

Officer. She only had 3 minutes and 20 seconds before her Pygmalion Choker went into cooldown mode again. Seeing that everyone in both vehicles already settled down, Lin Sanjiu closed the door of her truck, pulled out her key and started the engine. She stepped on the accelerator and sped toward where Fang Dan was. She did not need to swerve to avoid the obstacles as everything in front of them were weaponized and added to the net, opening a clear path for the two vehicles.

With the gigantic net she had set up, Fang Dan and Hai Tianqing should be safe for now. Before even half a minute passed, the brown rabbit which was on her shoulder suddenly bounced up, “That’s Hai Tianqing! I see Hai Tianqing!”

She could also see Hai Tianqing, with his hill-like physique, sitting up. Beside him, there was a woman lying on her side. Lin Sanjiu braked sharply, and the truck came to a screeching halt. The brown rabbit stumbled and crashed into the windscreen. That nearly made his nose crooked, he crawled up and cursed noisily. But when he turned to look at Lin Sanjiu, he noticed her sheet-white face.

“What wrong, seen a ghost?” the brown rabbit whispered as he turned back to the front to look.

That woman — the person who had been later identified as a traitor by the announcer — Fang Dan, was leaning against Hai Tianqing’s arm. She laid motionless, with her eyes wide opened. A large patch of blood spread out from her stomach, and there was a black knife handle sticking out of the wound. As the knife was too deep in her body, Lin Sanjiu took a few seconds to recognize what the murder weapon was. Her hands and legs shivered as she opened the door and got off her truck. Subsequently, Marcie, Hu Changzai, and Xu Xiaoyang also stepped out.

They could hear the vague sounds of screaming humans on the verge of death coming from far corners of Oasis; they could also smell the stench in the air as the duoluozhongs flapped their

wings; they could feel the sand in the wind. Then, almost as if emerging from a deadly silence, Lin Sanjiu walked toward Fang Dan's body in a daze.

"Don't come any nearer!" Hai Tianqing suddenly yelled out angrily, he looked as if he was about to stand up but he didn't move.

Lin Sanjiu felt some sand stuck to her face as a gust of wind blew past. When she reached to dust her face, she realized that she had been crying. She wiped her face and eyed Hai Tianqing coldly, "Did you kill her?"

Hu Changzai's voice was also trembling when he said, "Executive Hai... Why did you... I thought we had already discussed..."

"I didn't kill her!" Hai Tianqing pounded the ground with his fist, at the same time a nearby wall vibrated due to the tremor. "Brother Hu, quick! Come over here! You don't know, but the murderer is that woman!"

Hai Tianqing pointed at Lin Sanjiu with his thick index finger.

"At that time, I was only half-conscious, so I didn't wake up. Fang Dan appeared to have seen someone she knew. After that, I heard her calling that person 'Xiao Jiu'. She continued with a question, asking, 'Why isn't Marcie and Hu Changzai with you?' Then, I opened my eyes." Hai Tianqing inhaled sharply. He shot a look of fury at Lin Sanjiu, "I saw her! She was the person I saw. She stabbed Fang Dan even before I could say a word but I fainted at that critical point..."

As if she was drenched by a bucket of icy water, Lin Sanjiu could not say a word as she gripped the sides of her combat pants tightly, her shoulder trembled violently. Knowing the truth, Marcie also had a very grim expression on her face. They knew that the person that killed Fang Dan was 12.

"Why did 12 kill her... they had nothing against each other..." Lin

Sanjiu's voice was muffled. For the second time, she felt a heat radiating from her pocket. It was so hot that her skin started feeling painful, so she reached for the visa numbly.

Another line of red words appeared at the bottom of the visa: "The Consular Officer of Hyperthermal Hell has died, all visa issued by the aforesaid person are now invalid."

Lin Sanjiu and Marcie looked toward Hai Tianqing's direction. At the same time, Hu Changzai was standing beside Hai Tianqing explaining that Lin Sanjiu had been with them all this time and assured that there was no way that Lin Sanjiu could duplicate herself and kill Fang Dan. He even got the brown rabbit and Xu Xiaoyang to be her witness. Hai Tianqing was still doubtful, but when he saw the item in Lin Sanjiu's hand he shouted out again, "No, it's really her!"

"That woman looked for Fang Dan and asked for that visa or something. Fang Dan laughed and said, 'You actually found out that I have this useless ability.' Next, Fang Dan gave that woman that same paper! Once the woman received the paper, she killed Fang Dan!" Hai Tianqing continued, "When she died, that woman suddenly cursed vulgarly and said, 'So it'll become invalid if she dies', then she headed—"

Hai Tianqing finally realized the oddity of the entire situation. "Huh? That woman was heading for the main entrance of Oasis. Yet, all of you came from there..." He frowned, "the opposite direction."

After she composed herself, Lin Sanjiu said, "I have an enemy. He knows how to shapeshift."

When she spoke, her words seemed agonizing to her. "Hu Changzai, can you carry Fang Dan and place her in the truck? We can't leave her here, she will be consumed by those duoluozhongs. We don't have much time now. Let's go!"

Before this, she had never placed such emphasis on those last two

words.

She still had 1 minute, 56 seconds before the cooldown period of her Pygmalion Choker. Marcie did not move. Instead, she stopped Hu Changzai and passed him the bus key.

“Marcie, what are you doing?” Lin Sanjiu turned to her side and asked, feeling very uneasy.

After she said that, they heard a “Zzzt!” Marcie’s body suddenly began to fade like the image on an old television when the signal was bad.

“I need to leave first... Don’t worry, I’ll definitely make 12 pay for what he did,” Marcie said gently while smiling.

Chapter 69: Destroying Oasis in 30 Seconds

“Before the climate changed, before the temperature was high enough to kill, I was just an average man with a normal family. I lived an ordinary life with my wife of almost six years and my pair of three years old twin girls. We were happy. Even after the apocalypse, I still felt that I was extremely lucky. My wife and both daughters managed to develop the Heat Resistance Adaptation ability.

“I was the only one who gained an active skill. Even though it was nothing incredible, I tried my best to protect my family. I managed to get food, water, and a shelter. I always had a muscular built so none of the duoluozhongs could get close enough to harm my precious daughters. But the gods suddenly withdrew their blessings one particular night.

“That day, we drove for a long time, so the engine overheated. We needed time for it to cool down and also we were running out of gas. I knew that there was a gas station just a couple of streets away, and there was even a small shop selling car accessories. Of course, I would never leave my wife and children in an unfamiliar place just like that. Before I parked the car at the gas station, I surveyed the place three times and checked very carefully. That place was safe, there were no duoluozhongs, there weren't even any other humans.

“I found a number of useful items we could use and even saw a few duck plushies at the entrance of the shop. I was happy and quickly picked out two clean plushies. My daughters used to insist on having their rubber ducks in the bathtub before they bathe. At that time, I thought it would be a great idea to give them these two duck plushies since they could no longer bathe in a bathtub.

“While I carried cans of coolant and gas, reflective sheets, and two large duck plushies, I had to crook my head to look at the road ahead. When I walked out of the gas station, I realized that there

were two brown figures with carapace-like skin, standing on both sides of my car. I took at least a minute to recognize what they were. Perhaps, I had unintentionally made a sound, so the two figures straightened their backs and turned to look at me. I finally saw their human-like faces and their long mouthparts.

“My wife’s blood was still dripping from the mouthpart of the duoluozhong nearer to me.

“I can still clearly remember the duoluozhong standing beside my wife’s gray, lifeless face...”

“Hey, are you full? Let’s go. That person looks pretty strong,” it said to the other duoluozhong.

“But I haven’t finished drinking the blood of this young one. It’s so fresh...”

“My memory became a little hazy here. I vaguely remembered throwing down everything in my hands. I flew over, determined to save my daughter who might still be alive...”

“Ah! I know! Let’s do this...” the duoluozhong replied quickly and swiftly stuck its mouthpart through the car’s window and pulled it out again.

“Two little corpses dangled from its long mouthpart, and they looked like my daughters. The duoluozhong had used its mouthpart to pierce through both their heads, just like a kebab, and pulled their bodies out of the car. While I let out a heartbroken howl, they stretched out their wings. This made me realize how they could suddenly appear...

“After that, I never saw another winged duoluozhong again. Who would’ve known that they were just around us,” Hai Tianqing concluded as his eyes were plastered on the large number of duoluozhongs flying in the air and on the roofs of the buildings. He slowly stood up and said, “This is now my heaven. I will not leave unless I kill every one of them.”

Lin Sanjiu stood in front of her truck, listening quietly to his story.

Professor Bai sighed softly, “It’s all my fault. I led them here, so I inadvertently caused the death of your wife and children too.”

“Mom!” Xu Xiaoyang pled urgently, but Professor Bai suddenly smiled.

“In my whole life, this is the first time I realized how cowardly I am.” Professor Bai said mildly, “If I were killed by them, at least I wouldn’t need to face my guilt for the rest of my life. But the only thing I am worried about is you...”

The tip of Xu Xiaoyang’s nose had turned red, she pursed her lip, unable to say a word.

Hu Changzai glanced at them for a moment before he looked at Lin Sanjiu and asked, “How are things? Can you still see her?”

“I can still spot her from this distance,” Lin Sanjiu replied while she tried to calm herself. “Once she started running toward that direction, Marcie’s body had already stabilized. At least she no longer looks blurry.”

Hu Changzai heaved a sigh of relief. Now that Marcie was not in any danger of disappearing, they should leave but...

“What should we do now?” Hu Changzai watched Lin Sanjiu as he waited for a reply. He continued, “Are we really just going to leave them here?”

There was only 1 minute and 2 seconds left till the cooldown period of her Pygmalion Choker.

Lin Sanjiu laughed icily as she looked up at the sky.

After she slaughtered a large group of duoluozhongs, the duoluozhongs stopped chasing after them in one huge pack. Instead, most of them stayed on the roofs or hid themselves, as if waiting quietly for the right time to strike. The duoluozhongs

without wings had already made their way to the basements and were now in the middle of their massacre.

Just when Lin Sanjiu was about to announce that they were leaving, a few winged duoluozhongs flew quickly in Marcie's direction. Lin Sanjiu's eyelid twitched as she quickly sent a segment of the net toward them. Those duoluozhongs were torn apart in seconds.

"Miss Lin, shouldn't you be thinking of escaping now?" a man's calm voice rang out from the speakers. "Unfortunately, after we came to this bloody place, we became duoluozhongs because we didn't have the heat resistance adaptation. But you shouldn't look down on us since we were once posthumans. I know that the more powerful an ability is, the greater the restrictions are. With that ability, you're probably running out of time, right?"

"Isn't it better for you to think about how you should escape? Rather than think about others?" He laughed.

There were only 42 seconds left till the cooldown period of her Pygmalion Choker.

With an ice cold expression, Lin Sanjiu turned to look at Hai Tianqing and Xu Xiaoyang. Then, she said, "If you really intend to stay behind, you have 5 seconds each to say what your abilities are."

They both exchanged a glance and came to a decision immediately.

"Griselda is my ability," Xu Xiaoyang explained first.

Xu Xiaoyang's ability: 【War/Doll】

Description: The user has the ability to summon a humanoid combat doll. The user decides Griselda's features, gender, build, etc. Griselda's combat strength is determined by how satisfied it is with its own appearance. Without knowing the doll's preference, the user only has one chance to change the doll's appearance at

each stage. Even though otakus covet this ability, only normal people can gain this ability.

Current satisfaction level: 9%

[How unlucky...] Lin Sanjiu thought to herself as she briefly looked at Griselda's wavy hair and her devilishly beautiful looks before looking at Hai Tianqing.

“Gyming can also create obstacles for one's enemy.”

Hai Tianqing's ability: 【The glory of a personal trainer】

Description: The effect of the ability lasts for three minutes. Hai Tianqing will become a superstar athlete with superior physique. The item that he chooses in his mind will possess the characteristics of a particular gym equipment. This can be used for obstructing the enemy and to help himself.

The current usable gym equipment: Dumbbells, treadmill, yoga mat.

34 seconds left till cooldown.

“Starting from now, both of you must listen to my instructions without questions. Understand?” Lin Sanjiu shouted again, “Hu Changzai, drive that bus out of here and keep Professor Bai and the rabbit hidden!”

Hu Changzai quickly left and went to start the engines.

“What are you planning?” Xu Xiaoyang asked her, a little puzzled.

30 seconds left till cooldown.

Lin Sanjiu did not answer her. The items in mid-air wobbled a little. As if they had all suddenly lost their life force, they fell to the ground one after the other and reverted back to their normal state without that silver sheen.

When the silver net fell, the duoluo zhongs began to stir. A few impatient ones started flying toward them as if to test the water.

“Get Griselda to protect me!” Lin Sanjiu shouted as she set her eyes on the 7th floor of the Executives’ Building which was where the broadcasting room was located. “I’m going to disintegrate that! Get ready, Hai Tianqing!” Even though she was more powerful than Chen Jinfeng due to her Potential Growth Value, breaking down the entire floor of a building was still very taxing, even if she had already given up maintaining the protective silver net. She predicted that the duoluozhongs would take the opportunity and attack them like ravenous beasts once the process started... and she was right.

When the corner of the Executives’ Building melted off like an ice-cream cake, the duoluozhongs who figured out her plan went ballistic. The duoluozhongs gathered in the sky, covering it entirely, looming over them like dark gray clouds. Lin Sanjiu did not even bat an eye as she stood at the top of her truck, focusing on the Executives’ Building. Sweat began to appear on her forehead.

19 seconds until cooldown.

Even though Griselda was very unsatisfied with her own appearance, her attacks were still very potent. At that moment, her entire body swelled up with muscles and sinews. A blow from her arms could smash a duoluozhong to bits. However, as she could not fly, it was increasingly difficult for her to fight against those winged duoluozhongs who dodged her attacks nimbly in mid-air.

Similarly, Hai Tianqing was doing his best to protect Lin Sanjiu. “90kg dumbbells!” he shouted as he kicked up a massive amount of sand. The flying duoluozhongs flapped their wings desperately as the 90kg grains of sands crushed them to the ground. With the two people protecting her, Lin Sanjiu was surrounded by lumps of splattered flesh like pot-stickers fillings.

15 seconds until cooldown.

Lin Sanjiu managed to disintegrate the 7th floor. All the broken

down building materials and furniture floated upward and spun toward the center of the floor like a blender. However, they did not see a single drop of blood—there was no one on the 7th floor.

“Huh? Miss Lin, did I forget to inform you that I have a personal room. I was once a human, so I value privacy a lot,” they could hear the same unruffled male voice coming from the speakers. “It’s alright. Because once you reach the time limit of your ability, you will be able to meet me.”

9 seconds until cooldown.

“But, if you can still survive till then, why don’t you search every building to look for me?”

“How long more can you keep them back?” Lin Sanjiu asked loudly, ignoring the duoluozhong’s taunt.

“As long as you need!” Hai Tianqing replied with a grin, he inhaled deeply as a duoluozhong pierced its mouthpart through his previous wound. After he said that, the weaponized fragments made from the entire 7th floor fell to the ground and reverted to their normal forms.

“I want to take a gamble. I need both of you to hang in there!” after she said that, Lin Sanjiu’s body started to tremble slightly — this was the side-effect of her pushing herself to her limits. Sweat gushed from her pores, flowing past her eyebrows and down her nose. Her tank top was gradually soaked with sweat.

5 seconds until cooldown.

The attacks from the duoluozhongs were getting more and more intense. Even with Hai Tianqing’s sand dumbbells, Griselda’s body was covered with multiple wounds. At that moment, multiple buildings in Oasis seemed to have lost their roofs, like a clean shaven head. The broken weaponized fragments floated in the air, but the overall structure of the buildings remained stubbornly unchanged.

4 seconds until cooldown.

“Move, dammit!” Lin Sanjiu gritted her teeth, her head was hurting as if multiple steel needles had pierced through her brain.

3 seconds until cooldown.

“How much longer will it take? Griselda can’t last much longer!” Xu Xiaoyang, who stood behind them, couldn’t help yelling out as she dodged the various duoluozhongs’ attacks agilely.

The nearby buildings shook for a fraction of a second and were broken down in succession. Three buildings were dissolved around the same time. The sharp weaponized building materials danced in mid-air, instantly killing off countless duoluozhongs. Unfortunately, they could still hear the loathsome laughter over the speaker, “Good effort!”

2 seconds until cooldown.

[I can’t do this, I think I need to give up here...] This flashed through Lin Sanjiu’s groggy mind. [If I knew this would happen, I wouldn’t have acted so impulsively just because I was angry. I should have run away... Now, I can’t leave even if I wanted and I even implicate the others.]

“My student, Lin Sanjiu. Special Items are powered by your metabolic energy, but you’ve already used up all your energy.” Amidst her dizziness, she vaguely heard Mrs. Manas’s voice, “Do you want to use... your... cons—?”

As Lin Sanjiu was on the verge of total exhaustion, she could not clearly hear what Mrs. Manas said, she only answered instinctively, “Yes...”

The 5 minutes were up, and Lin Sanjiu’s Pygmalion Choker entered its cooldown state.

As if they’ve suddenly sensed it, the two people who were currently fighting paused for a moment and looking into the distance. Half of the buildings in the factory compound were still

intact. They stood firmly under the night sky, with no indication that anything had affected them.

The speaker buzzed again, and the man's maniacal laughter filled Oasis, "Hahaha! I think that's the end of your—"

Before he even finished his sentence, there was a large boom! The buildings which appeared intact just moments dissolved into fine dust in an instant. Before the duoluozhongs' expressions could even change, they were ground into meat paste by the weaponized bits of dust. As if multiple TNT bombs had exploded in the large factory compound, Oasis disintegrated into a large pile of fine dust, along with all the duoluozhongs.

The duoluozhong who had mocked them the entire time was finally now only a part of that pile.

As the others watched silently in utter disbelief, Lin Sanjiu lose her consciousness and fell head first off the top of her truck. Hai Tianqing rushed over and caught her.

Oasis has been totally destroyed in 30 seconds.

Chapter 70: What Did You Say?

While she was still in a half-conscious state, Lin Sanjiu could hear a constant soft “pitter-patter” sound which disturbed her utterly exhausted mind. From the jerky movements she felt, she could tell that she was in a vehicle...

A packet of butter cookies, on top of a large carton, shifted about with the jerky movement of the bus, just like Lin Sanjiu. A furry paw appeared behind the carton as if it was trying to sneakily snatch the packet of cookies. However, the bus suddenly jerked, so the paw accidentally pushed the packet of cookies off the carton. “Agh!” The packet of cookies hit someone.

The culprit stuck his head out and stuck his head out and incidentally locked eyes with Lin Sanjiu.

“You... You’re awake? Haha...” B.Rabbit[1] laughed dryly.

Lin Sanjiu removed the packet of cookies from her face. She still felt giddy, but she slowly sat up and looked around. She was lying in the aisle of the bus; apparently, someone thoughtful had spread out a towel before she laid down. She could see tall stacks of cartons beside her, and she figured that the others probably had to make space for her to lie down. At that moment, B.Rabbit climbed up to one of the top cartons.

“Xiao Jiu? You’re awake?”

Hu Changzai’s voice rang out from the driver’s seat as he took a second to look behind. When he saw that Lin Sanjiu could already sit up, his face immediately lit up. “That’s great! I have been worried about you!”

After hearing that, her memories slowly came back to her, filling her groggy head.

[Fang Dan had been killed by 12.]

The first thought that emerged strangled her heart tightly. [Who

would have known that she was a Consular Officer?] Thus, Lin Sanjiu came to accept that she didn't just lose the chance to get a visa but more importantly, she has lost a friend.

Subsequently, she began to summarize the events in her head. When the five Executives were defeated, 12 took the opportunity and escaped while Oasis was empty. Marcie left ahead of them as she had to maintain the distance between herself and 12 to keep her corporeal form. Right now, Lin Sanjiu did not know where they were. [How's Marcie? Has Luther woken up?]

"How long have I been sleeping?" Lin Sanjiu was only conscious about how dry her throat was when she started speaking.

Hu Changzai eyed Lin Sanjiu through the rearview mirror before he replied, sounded a little worried, "It has been a week. Luckily, you had a normal pulse and breathing rate, I nearly thought that you were dead..."

[A week!?] Lin Sanjiu was shocked, and she immediately stood up. Her legs wobbled a little, and she nearly lost her balance. "It has been that long? Then, Marcie..."

Hu Changzai already expected Lin Sanjiu's question, he couldn't help sighing as he replied, "After you fainted, we discussed and decided to head in the same direction as Marcie. However, even after traveling for quite some distance, we didn't see Marcie. I guessed we might have taken a wrong turn, or perhaps they changed direction midway..."

[That is to say, we lost contact with Marcie.]

Lin Sanjiu's head started to hurt. She found herself at a loss as her head pulsed with pain while her intense waves of emotions — anxiousness, worry, and remorse — seemed to ebb a little. Instead, a rather comforting thought became clearer and clearer to her: No news might be the best news...

Lin Sanjiu straightened her body and looked around the bus

carefully. She felt some complicated feelings when she realized that, after staying at Oasis for less than two weeks, her previous companions were all gone and were replaced by a group of new faces.

Ultimately, B.Rabbit took another packet of cookies. He tore open the packet with his teeth, and a small round puff appeared on one side of his cheek as he munched on the cookies noisily.

Lin Sanjiu stared at the rabbit and frowned as her mind churned, “Where is Professor Bai, Xu Xiaoyang, and Hai Tianqing? Why is this rabbit here instead?”

“Executive Hai is driving your truck now. As for Professor Bai... While you were unconscious, we found about 20-odd survivors in the rubble. They managed to escape the duoluozhongs. Professor Bai said that she needed to take responsibility for what she’d done, so she stayed behind with Xu Xiaoyang. They intend to build a new refuge for humans, one without any duoluozhongs. However, without the technology from the duoluozhong’s world, I think it will be diff...” Hu Changzai couldn’t help sounding a little emotional at this point, “I’m sorry. Even though the items in the vehicles were yours, I left some of it with them based on my own discretion.”

That wasn’t really a big deal to Lin Sanjiu. However, Lin Sanjiu found herself looking at B.Rabbit when Hu Changzai brought up the subject about food. Somehow B.Rabbit caught her gaze and tilted his head upward with an incomprehensible pride. “Even though I found you both a little violent, but all of you are quite righteous. Besides, your combat skills are really pitiable, so I was worried for you. Thus, I decided to stay.”

Totally unconcerned about B.Rabbit’s image, Hu Changzai blurted, “He’s lying. He is just a rabbit. So, no matter how powerful he is, there will always be someone stronger. Considering the fact that he might be caught and eaten any day... he’s staying with us for his own safety. Plus, he is on good terms with Executive

Hai.”

Despite the hardship that they had just gone through, Lin Sanjiu felt a slight urge to laugh when she saw B.Rabbit’s furious face. Since everything was explained, her focus changed to the “pitter patter” sound that she could still hear even though she was fully awake...

She was stunned when she looked through the windows carefully. She couldn’t even speak properly, “It’s... It’s...”

She didn’t notice it previously because the white steam outside fogged up all the windows. She only saw the endless droplets of water lashing against the windows when she looked closer. They converged into a stream of water at the corners of the windows.

Lin Sanjiu touched the windows which were unbearably hot on a normal day, she found what she saw a little hard to believe and asked, “It’s raining?”

“Yup,” B.Rabbit answered. He jumped down from the cartons and opened the packet of cookies which had previously fallen on Lin Sanjiu’s face. As he ate, he continued, “It has already been days, and we’re fed up with it. The rainwater is scalding hot, and it is not portable. It has a sulfur smell... We can’t even drive quickly, and the windshield wipers are going to be totally damaged. It’s super annoying!”

“Oh.” Lin Sanjiu still found the rain a novelty and watched it for some time. After a while, she even opened the windows. Just as the rabbit had described, the temperature of the water was only slightly lower than its boiling point. In the past, that temperature would have caused a bad burn but right now, it only felt warm to Lin Sanjiu, and that sensation was quite comfortable.

[The smell of sulfur is really quite strong... Wait? Can’t we treat this like a hot spring?]

Ever since the descent of Hyperthermal Hell, she was covered

with perspiration every day, yet she could not take even one proper bath. She felt a sudden desire bubbling in her heart. For the past two months, she felt like she was a wild hog — her skin was covered with layers upon layers of sand and dust mixed with her sweat, so her skin felt extremely rough.

She immediately got Hu Changzai to stop the bus. Then, they called for Hai Tianqing to also park the truck. She quickly rallied the two men and a rabbit to go look for a bucket with her.

Buckets seem like very common things, but when they tried to search for one, it was harder than they thought. This was especially true as all plastic items have already become deformed due to the temperature. They searched their surroundings but couldn't find any. In the end, Lin Sanjiu rolled up her sleeves and dug a hole with the depth of half the height of a man. Then, she used some reflective sheets and some rocks to cover the bottom and the sides of the hole to prevent water from leaking out. As the rain was quite heavy, the hole was filled to the brim rather quickly, creating a “hot spring tub”.

Even though the water didn't look that clean, but it was already a luxury.

As for the men, they did not bother digging any holes. As they suddenly got into the mood for a bath, they treated the rain like an outdoor hot shower. Once they walked away, Lin Sanjiu grabbed B.Rabbit without warning and pushed him into the water, laughing, “Come, you should also enjoy!” After she said that, she took her clothes and jumped into the “tub”.

“Wahhh!” B.Rabbit's head popped out from the surface of the water and complained angrily, “Rabbits don't need to bathe!”

When he turned and saw Lin Sanjiu's bare shoulders poking out from the waters, only half visible due to the steam, he clicked his tongue awkwardly and turned back to play with his ears. “Actually, I am a male rabbit.”

Lin Sanjiu looked at the rabbit and said, “So what? You’re still a rabbit.”

Even if he knew human speech, Lin Sanjiu only treated him as a cute furry animal, so she did not feel embarrassed at all!

“What’s up with you anyway? Why can you speak and why do you have abilities?” Lin Sanjiu asked casually as she continued to splash water at herself.

“As you can see from how cute I am, I was once a pet rabbit. I am even of a famous breed.” B.Rabbit seemed to have forgotten the awkwardness he felt previously once he starting recalling his memories. He dragged his voice and started to tell his story: “Even though my owner was quite hateable as he always limited my freedom, but, to be honest, he still loved me. I remembered that on the day the temperature shot up, there was nothing in the house. There was no water and no food... Even though my owner was very weak, he left the house to look for food. He returned after one whole day covered with wounds. He had a packet of instant noodles and even managed to get a handful of grass.”

The pet rabbit of an acclaimed breed paused for a moment before he continued sounding a little sad, “When I think back about it, it was really amazing that he managed to find some grass. But I was just a silly rabbit then, so I finished the grass with a few bites. I didn’t think much about it. After I ate that grass, my intelligently gradually increased and I also developed abilities. Unfortunately, my owner couldn’t endure any longer and passed away.”

[That grass must have probably been a special item...] Lin Sanjiu tried to imagine the rabbit’s owner. She felt that he must have been a very gentle person. She sighed and petted the rabbit’s head as if to placate him.

“Since you know that I’m a pet rabbit with a name, you can call me ‘Yo Daddy’,“ B.Rabbit said firmly. The hand on his head immediately pressed him into the water.

After Lin Sanjiu teased B.Rabbit for a while, the rabbit splashed her face with water using his ears. Maybe it was because she had some fun, or because the bath was really relaxing, but she felt a little better. After she felt that she was clean enough and encouraged by her terrible hunger since she had been unconscious for a week, Lin Sanjiu finally climbed out of the hole reluctantly. She changed into a set of clean clothes that she had prepared beforehand.

The scathing rain continued to pour from the sky as if to compensate for the previous dry days. Huge fogs of steam rose from the ground and filled the air. This constant production of steam created a dense fog which blocked their view.

“Hey, Hu Changzai, are you two done bathing? Where are you? We are going over right now!” Lin Sanjiu yelled out, “You better wear your clothes quickly!”

Hu Changzai acknowledged her with an anxious mumble.

“I already said that I’m a male rabbit... It’s alright for me to look at them,” B.Rabbit grumbled.

Once she was certain of the direction, Lin Sanjiu and the rabbit headed toward Hu Changzai’s location. As the white fog was too thick, they couldn’t really see the road, so it was a little tough. [But it was not possible that we haven’t reached him even after walking for 20 minutes, right?] Lin Sanjiu thought to herself.

After she shouted a few phrases in succession and did not receive any reply, Lin Sanjiu stopped. Her expression hardened. B.Rabbit also sensed that something was wrong, “That’s weird. His voice definitely came from this direction, and he didn’t sound this far.”

They exchanged a glance and started raising their guard.

Just as they were about to take a step forward, the sound of a loud gong broke the silence of their foggy surroundings. They were startled! The sound of the gong seemed to come from all around

them. “Good afternoon, everyone!” they heard an enthusiastic voice but did not know where it was coming from.

At that moment, people came out from the fog accompanied by quiet chatter. If those two people standing closest to her didn’t look so shocked — at least they seemed more anxious than her — she would have punched them. The two people were whispering to each other, and they sounded very uneasy.

They could see more and more figures within the fog. They could sense a strange and indescribable pressure gradually building up. Just when Lin Sanjiu was about to grab the rabbit and run, the loud voice boomed again, “So, is everyone present now? I am happy to welcome all of you to the year-end Red vs. White Challenge [2] to ring in the new year!”

TN: [1] As the brown rabbit is going to be a recurring character for a few chapters, his name will be translated as B.Rabbit from this chapter.

[2] I think this red vs. white new year eve tradition should be from Japan. They have a program called Kōhaku Uta Gassen every year.

Chapter 71: Rules and Regulations of Red vs. White

It was indeed the end of December. If the New World didn't descend upon their universe, everyone should be busy making preparations to celebrate the new year, but now...

"Oh no! The fog is too thick! The contestants can't see each other... We must just blow it away!" the loud voice bellowed, and subsequently, he huffed and puffed using his own mouth. The thing that weirded everyone out was that the white fog started to move gradually. Most of the fog dissipated, revealing the original surroundings.

[No, that's not right. This isn't our original surroundings...] Lin Sanjiu's eyes widened when she saw the ground. She was standing in a large circle. There was a line in the middle of the circle, and one half of it was red while the other half was white.

Lin Sanjiu, B.Rabbit, and the four other strangers standing near to her made up a six-persons team on the red side. Meanwhile, the white half of the circle was about 50 meters away, and there were also six people there. She saw two very familiar faces out of the six people in the other team — one of them was the bespectacled Hu Changzai who always looked prim and proper; the other was Hai Tianqing who was so large that the others withdrew from him, forcing his five other members to stand at the sides of the circle.

The three people and one rabbit exchanged glances with each other, finding it a little hard to respond to what had just happened. When Hu Changzai saw the circle on the ground, his mouth moved anxiously, and he started gesturing with both his hands. Watching him for a while, Lin Sanjiu couldn't hear him at all. It was as if there was an invisible partition which blocked off the sound from the other half of the circle.

Lin Sanjiu finally reacted when she heard that loud voice again,

she turned around and tried to search for its source. Oddly, even though the wind, which dissipated the fog around them, came from the direction where the announcer was standing, the announcer himself remained hidden in the thick fog so she couldn't make out his face.

"I'm Mr. Dot, the host of this Pocket Dimension. It's an honor to meet all of you here... Can you see all your team members now? The people who are standing within the same semicircle are your team members, and your opponents are the people in the opposite semicircle! Come on! Before we begin the Red vs. White Challenge, why don't you introduce yourself to your fellow members?"

As Mr. Dot finished his sentence, a man standing beside Lin Sanjiu immediately retorted, "Hey, are you crazy? This is not the right time to hold such a stupid challenge... I don't have time to play your games!"

The man looked to be only about slightly over twenty. He had a crew cut, and he seemed to be quite irascible. "Are all of you just gonna stay here?" he yelled out. Since nobody replied, he turned and left, ignoring the others. His silhouette quickly disappeared into the fog.

Mr. Dot appeared to be unaffected by the man's departure, he remained silent as if waiting for everyone to start on their introductions.

Due to the man's action, the remaining five people didn't say a word as they stared at the leaving figure. They only started interacting with each other when they could no longer see him. Other than Lin Sanjiu and B.Rabbit, the Red Team consisted of two people, who were obviously a couple, and a middle-aged man. The petite young woman with a straight fringe looked very nervous as she held the corner of her boyfriend's shirt. Her boyfriend was not very tall, he was very fair and slightly plump; he reminded Lin Sanjiu of a milk pudding — a milk pudding in clothes. At that moment, he was comforting his girlfriend with a gentle voice.

The middle-aged man had a gloomy-looking face, and he stood alone on the side. As the warm rain was still pouring down on them, everyone was soaked. Their clothes stuck to their skins tightly, becoming partially transparent. The round beer belly under the middle-aged man's shirt could clearly be seen while he leered at all the women in the arena nonstop. This seemed to be a habit he had his entire life, something that wouldn't change even after the end of the world.

As Lin Sanjiu was wearing a black singlet and baggy camo pants, there was nothing to see; however, the other woman in her team was wearing a cotton burlap skirt. The woman hid behind her boyfriend all this time, she was clearly uncomfortable when the middle-aged man looked over.

When the middle-aged man's lecherous gaze floated passed the women in the White Team for the fourth time, a woman, wearing a mini skirt which showed off her pair of long legs, couldn't tolerate that man any longer. She sprinted toward the Red Team, but just as she was about to step on the line in the middle, she revealed an expression of shock before she immediately pulled back, stopping just behind the line. After that, the long-legged woman gave the middle-aged man a vicious glare, her lips pursed into a thin line and she returned to her team members.

[It seems like we can't cross the boundaries and we also can't hear our opponents.] Both Lin Sanjiu and Hu Changzai could see the doubts in each other's face. Lin Sanjiu observed the members of the White Team then she looked at Hu Changzai and shook her head. She did not know if he understood what she was trying to express.

"Hey?"

Just then, a voice came from behind the members of the Red Team, and it instantly grabbed the attention of everyone. Lin Sanjiu looked behind and saw the previously agitated man. He was startled when he realized that he was standing behind the five

other members. However, Lin Sanjiu was not surprised

"I must have lost my way..." the brash man mumbled as he turned to walk away still unwilling to give up.

"Don't waste your effort," Lin Sanjiu couldn't stand it any longer, so she finally called him to stop. "If we are in a Pocket Dimension, no one can get out unless we complete the given tasks."

Once she said that, all the members of the Red Team were stunned.

Just as she had expected, the people here were all original survivors of Hyperthermal Hell so they had probably never heard of the thing called Pocket Dimension. This was also the first time that B.Rabbit had heard about this matter.

As the subject on Pocket Dimensions sounded quite outrageous, Lin Sanjiu tried her best to simplify her explanation. Despite that, the other members still held their misgivings. Instead, when B.Rabbit spoke, they looked even more shocked. Regardless the uncertainty and doubts they had, everyone stayed behind after some commotion.

After five minutes, they heard clapping sounds coming from Mr. Dot's direction, this ended the conversations within the two teams. "I am glad to see that all of you are getting along quite well with your team members," Mr. Dot said this with a light-hearted tone as he laughed. However, his next sentence made it difficult for anyone to relax: "But, one of the members of the Red Team did not comply with my suggested course of action and even tried to leave on his own accord. I regret to inform all of you that I have to deduct one point from the Red Team even before the games begin..."

After he said that, a "-1" appeared in mid-air above the ground near the boundary line on the red side, it was even glowing faintly. They did not know how the -1 would affect them, but the expression of all the members of the Red Team turned grim

because they had some sense that it wasn't something good.

[If we don't comply with his suggestions, he will penalize us by deducting points from our scores?] Lin Sanjiu considered this feeling a little troubled. They didn't really talk much with each other just now, and she didn't even get to know their names. She only secretly gave them each a nickname.

[Does this already count as an introduction?]

She was still pondering about the matter when the host spoke again: "Luckily, one of the members of the Red Team provided her own team with some basic information on Pocket Dimensions. Thus, the Red Team can get one treasure chest!"

This immediately roused a quiet commotion within the Red Team. Even though no one knew what that treasure chest was, it was clearly something beneficial. They all thought that this would perhaps close the gap between both teams, so their faces seemed to lighten a bit but Mr. Dot continued, "For the same reason, the White Team can also get one treasure chest!"

"All of you might be wondering: what's the use of a treasure chest? So, now I will list out and explain the rules of today's challenge!"

[Year-end Red Vs. White Challenge]

Number of contestants: 6 people in each team, 12 people in total.

Rules:

1. Mr. Dot will decide on four games. Not all team members are required to compete in each game. Each team only needs to send out the minimum number of required contestants for each game. In addition to that, the number of contestants sent out from each team must be the same.

2. There is no limit to the number of times a member can join a game, but every member must join at least 2 games or face a death penalty.

3. The contestant for each game must be voted by the team, a member can only be a contestant if they get a majority vote from their team.

4. Some games will provide you an additional opportunity to gain points. If a contestant manages to discover and gain the additional point in the game, the team will be awarded +1 points. Winning a game will gain you +1 points. The team with the highest score will win.

5. Similarly, there is also a risk of losing your points in a game.

6. Under special circumstances, teams can get special "treasure chests". The rewards range from the incredible heaven-sent gift of +10 points to -10 points. The possibilities are endless.

7. Before every game commences, the team members from each team who are not participating will have to offer up one of their own items as a "prize". The prize can be a Special Item or an Active Skill. After the members have offered their prizes, all the prizes from the losing team will be given to the winning team. For example, if Member A from the Red Team offers his "Fart Propelling" ability and the Red Team loses, then this "Fart Propelling" ability will be given to one of the members of the White Team. If all the members participate in the game, the prizes will be randomly chosen by Mr. Dot.

8. The team will discuss and decide on how the prizes should be distributed. If the discussions reach a stalemate, Mr. Dot will make a judgment and distribute the prizes based on the individual contribution of each member. The member with the greatest contribution will receive the prizes.

9. The losing team for the entire challenge will not only have to return all the prizes that they have won. They would also be stripped of all their Active abilities and Special Items. These will also become prizes for the winning team. In addition to that, each of the members of the winning team can receive a special prize

from Mr. Dot.

10. The Pocket Dimension will end after the winning team has been decided.

After they heard those ten lengthy rules, everyone remained silent for a very long time. From when they first heard Mr. Dot speaking, it was only now that everyone accepted the situation in front of them.

"If there is a possibility of getting a crappy penalty from the treasure chest, why the f*ck does he call it a treasure chest?!" the brash man cursed.

"I am more worried about the matter regarding the prizes..." the fair-skinned boyfriend said worriedly. "Even though we have no idea what the games are, if our opponents gained an additional ability, it would be a great disadvantage for us."

His girlfriend turned pale, and she even sounded like she was about to sob, "I... I only have one ability. I can't offer my ability as a prize. Without my ability, I will definitely die very quickly..." Her boyfriend was quick to comfort her with his gentle voice, he held her hands tightly and said, "Don't be afraid. No one will force you..."

Even though the pot-bellied middle-aged man said nothing, at least he stopped leering at the women. His thick eyelids drooped while he seemed to be deep in thought. Lin Sanjiu and B.Rabbit exchanged glances, both their expressions were dead serious.

Even though they roughly knew all the ten rules, they didn't know why they had a feeling that those rules were filled with pitfalls and traps.

Besides, both herself and B.Rabbit were in an almost impossible situation: They not only need to win but they can't let Hu Changzai and Hai Tianqing lose.

"The rules have been explained. Please sent the member who

contributed to the team up here to receive the prize!"

Naturally, on the Red Team, that member was Lin Sanjiu. She hesitated for a while and glanced over at the White Team. Lin Sanjiu was aware that the particular member from the White Team would be a formidable opponent: since that person knew what a Pocket Dimension was, there was a high possibility that the person came from another world. Comparing their experience and their abilities, it would probably be difficult to deal with that person.

When she turned to look, she saw a skinny woman walking away from the White Team. Lin Sanjiu mistook her for an elderly woman when she first saw her. But upon closer inspection, Lin Sanjiu realized that the woman was in her forties or fifties. The woman looked much older than she really was as her face was covered with wrinkles and her triangular eyes drooped listlessly. That woman even had a rather acrimonious appearance.

This haggard-looking woman eyed Lin Sanjiu for a second and looked forward again. She walked directly into the fog. Lin Sanjiu finally reacted and removed the rabbit from her shoulders hurriedly and also walked into the fog. Once the white fog surrounded her, she saw a black wooden chest not far from her, but she couldn't even see a lock. If she reached out for it, she could easily open it. She turned to look behind her, but she could no longer see her team members.

Lin Sanjiu inhaled sharply and closed her eyes as she opened the treasure chest.

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(1)

"Ding-dong!" the chest opened revealing its empty base. Lin Sanjiu was stunned. She touched the bottom of the chest, finding it hard to believe that it was totally empty. From what she felt, it was just a normal wooden chest, there was really nothing in it.

[Does this mean that I got an empty chest by chance?]

"Okay, both contestants, please return to your teams after you have collected your prizes!" Mr. Dot's voice suddenly rang out.

Even though Lin Sanjiu was puzzled, she had no choice but to leave. Before she left, she touched the bottom of the chest again; luckily, Mr. Dot did not seem to notice and didn't say anything. When Lin Sanjiu was walking back, she turned to observe the skinny woman on the other side walking out from the white fog. That woman was frowning and appeared to be baffled.

When she returned to the red semicircle, her team members surrounded her and asked her worriedly, "What did you get?"

Lin Sanjiu shook her head, expressing that she did not know. Just then, Mr. Dot aptly made an announcement: "Now I'll announce the prize that each of the team received... Red Team, congratulations! You received a Chance to 'PASS'. You can skip a task in one of the games if you use this Chance. On the other hand, the White Team isn't that lucky... you have unlocked a 'Witch's curse'. The next time you gain two consecutive points, one point will be deducted."

Apart from Lin Sanjiu and B.Rabbit, the four other members of the Red Team couldn't help letting out a sigh of relief. Even though they were still unclear about the situation they were in, their expression became a little less tense. The penalty which the White Team received was not that serious, but in some sense, it helped to

balance out the scores again.

"Since we are not at a disadvantage, I think this could be something good," the pot-bellied man said unexpectedly. His eyes widened, and the corner of his lips revealed a faint gluttonous excitement, "If we win this challenge, we can get someone else's active abilities and items... Don't you find it rather tempting?" The others were quite stunned by this man's frankness. The brash man licked his lips and looked over at the White Team members, mumbling, "That's right... That huge man over there looks strong. It will be great if I could get his ability."

The huge man was undoubtedly Hai Tianqing. Lin Sanjiu felt a little uncomfortable about that comment, she shot a glance at the brash man. The fair-skinned man showed his disapproval with a bitter smile and quietly said, "Beggar-thy-neighbor? That's..."

His girlfriend tugged his sleeve and consoled softly, "Honey, we didn't set the rules... I'm satisfied as long as we don't lose."

The words that the woman said actually meant the same thing as the other two men, but it was just more tactful. When the other two men heard this, they nodded vehemently and repeated her words. With that, the fair-skinned man couldn't really say anything else, and thus the few of them came to a consensus within the short exchange of words. Even though they already knew that they were on the same team earlier, it was only now that they felt a slight sense of camaraderie as they shared a common "enemy". The pot-bellied man offered his thick pudgy hands as he laughed and said, "My surname is Wang. I used to run a small business... But right now, that's not relevant."

"Boss Wang." The brash man shook his hand. "My surname is Chen. You can just call me Chen Fan. I'm quite an impulsive person, so I seek your understanding."

"Hey, just call me Old Wang, I am not a boss or anything!" After Old Wang had shaken Chen Fan's hand, he offered his hand to the

woman with a straight fringe. No woman in this world would willingly shake that man's hand. She pulled her wet shirt, which was now partially transparent due to the rain, from her body and hid behind her boyfriend before she replied uneasily, "I'm Lara Lian, and this is my boyfriend, Zhong Junkai."

"Oh?" Old Wang replied curtly and eyed the fair-skinned Zhong Junkai for a second with an unreadable expression. Then, he offered his hand to Lin Sanjiu, "And you're?"

"My surname is Lin." She crossed her arms as she threw a sideward glance at Old Wang's hand. The latter hesitated for a moment before he pulled back his hand sheepishly.

Wearing a black tank top and camo pants, Lin Sanjiu looked like she just came out of a bloodbath. Her serious frown along with the multiple bandages on her body gave her a presence which was more than enough to deter the others from trying to engage in any random conversations with her. After everybody got acquainted, the atmosphere became a little livelier. After lamenting about the apocalyptic state of their world, they gradually started to smile, proving that humans have an incredible ability to adapt to their situation despite everything. With a sweeping glance, Lin Sanjiu found that the White Team members also had similar reactions. Setting aside Hu Changzai and Hai Tianqing, the remaining members' eyes shone with excitement and eagerness. Apparently, they also view the Red Team as their tempting rewards.

Acting like she was just exploring the place, Lin Sanjiu created some distance between herself and the others. After that, she whispered to B.Rabbit who was back on her shoulder, "I think there is something very wrong with this challenge."

B.Rabbit was currently in a bad mood because they had left him out when everybody was introducing themselves. "What's wrong?" he said, looking unhappily.

"You don't sense it?" Lin Sanjiu looked down expressionlessly,

"Those ten rules are really weird. There are lots of restrictions between members in the same team, way more than necessary. I think that such alliances based on common interest are too fragile... I'm a little worried."

B.Rabbit immediately stared at her with his pair of black eyes. "What are you worried about?"

"You're small, so you can easily go unnoticed when you're not talking. I hope you can help me keep an eye on... the others," Lin Sanjiu did not answer him directly. "I think I overused one of my abilities, so it is currently sealed... Right now, I'm not in my best condition."

When she was fighting back in Oasis, she vaguely heard Mrs. Manas voice asking her whether she wanted to do something. After she woke up, she nearly forgot about that. However, Lin Sanjiu quickly realized that something was wrong, when she tried to enter the [School of Higher Consciousness], she saw only a lifeless patch of gray in front of her, as if the ability had been totally sealed.

When she thought about it, it was quite unbelievable that she could destroy Oasis entirely, considering her remaining strength at that point. That event was definitely linked to the reason why her ability was sealed, but before she even had a clue, they entered this pocket dimension, of all times.

"I am happy to see all of you getting into the swing of things. Since everyone has grown familiar with each other, it's time to start the first game!" Mr. Dot said enthusiastically.

The arena buzzed with chatter as everyone looked toward the white fog with expectant faces even though they couldn't see Mr. Dot clearly.

"The name of the first game is [Your Fate Depends on Sugoroku]. Let me explain how you should play this game. Sugoroku[1] is a type of popular board game, and Monopoly is the most famous

variant of this game. In a normal game, the player must roll two dices, then move his pieces forward according to the number of pips. The person who reaches the finishing point first would be considered the winner. But [Your Fate Depends on Sugoroku] is slightly different...

"The player will start from their own side respectively, the first person to pass all 16 squares to reach the finishing point will be the winner. But, the number of steps you can advance is determined by your opponent."

"What?" After Mr. Dot said that, a series of questions erupted within the teams.

"If the winner is the first person who reaches the finishing point... Then, as a player, I would stop my opponent from reaching first, right?" Lara asked her boyfriend, perplexed.

But Mr. Dot continued, "Now, for the rules of this game: When deciding the number of steps that your opponent can move, the minimum is one step, and the maximum is not larger than the number of squares left. So, if your opponent is on the second square, the largest number of steps you can get him or her to advance is $16-2=14$, so he or she will end up one step away from the last square. You cannot refuse to state a number, you cannot choose 0, and you cannot ask your opponent to move backward."

"That means, even if the opponent determines the number of steps to advance, the player can still go forward... even if it is one step at a time," Lin Sanjiu mumbled to herself, "The White Team will determine how many steps we will go forward, but we can also determine theirs..."

"To ensure that this game is totally fair and that there is no first-mover advantage, there is no need to determine who shall move first," Mr. Dot sounded quite cheerful when he said that. "After both teams have informed me about their chosen number, I will announce the number of steps to move, then both players will

move accordingly. Thus, resolving that issue... If both players reach the finishing point at the same time, then the winner will be determined by a duel.

"The minimum number of players for this game is 2, and the maximum number of players is also 2."

"And he still calls it a game, in the end, isn't it still determined by a duel?" Lara was a quick-thinker, she wiped off the water on her face and grumbled, "Who would let their opponent move ahead of them? It would probably end with both players reaching the finishing point at the same time, then battling it out..."

"Don't worry, I think no one would choose you as a contestant for this game," Zhong Junkai comforted her gently. At this point, Chen Fan raised his voice and said, "If we have to fight, it is best to rely on us, guys."

Suddenly, 16 squares appeared on both the red and white semicircles, creating a small route. Near to the end of the route, which was the boundary line between both semi circles, both routes led to an additional square with a yellow border — it was the finishing square. However, other than the finishing point, there was a question mark on each of the squares, and no one knew what they represented.

"Is everybody ready? Please choose your contestants in five minutes!" The first game finally commenced with Mr. Dot's words.

TN: [1] This is the official name in English, but this game originated in China as Shuanglu/Shuangliu which means double sixes in Chinese and kanji. But it was actually adapted from an Indian game!

Chapter 73: Your Fate Depends on Sugoroku (2)

After Mr. Dot said that, everyone's expressions turned a little weird. For this game of Sugoroku, each team could only send one player each. According to rule 7: "Before every game commences, the team members from each team who are not participating will have to offer up one of their own items as a prize". Thus it was obvious that everyone wanted to be the contestant for the game.

After all, the contestant would not receive any sort of penalty even if he or she loses; however, the remaining team members would have to give up their item. Before the first game even officially started, everyone avoided each other's gaze and lowered their heads, contemplating.

Since no one spoke even after some time, Lara asked in a quiet, mousy voice, "Well... who should represent us for this game?"

Without showing a shred of modesty, Chen Fan answered her boldly, "Didn't I address that just now? In the end, this game would be determined by a duel. So, of course, we should choose a male contestant!"

Lara's face froze for a second, unable to immediately argue against him. As if to remedy to her mistake, she quickly added, "You can't put it that way! The players would use their abilities to duel, so it is not about one's physical strength... Besides, if the White Team chooses a female contestant, then I... Uh... and Miss Lin can also be chosen!"

"No matter who participates, I don't have any opinion on—" Zhong Junkai seemed to be little reserved about it, but before he finished his sentence, his girlfriend pulled his shirt sleeve, so he swallowed the remaining words.

Old Wang looked at Lara — but this time he wasn't staring at her

breasts. "Little girl, you're too naive. The first game is the most stressful round. You are just a delicate lady, what will we do if you somehow can't take the pressure? If nobody objects, I can be the contestant."

When he said that, the other members, except for the expressionless Lin Sanjiu and B.Rabbit, instantly felt a little uneasy. Lin Sanjiu remained silent as she watched the other members bicker. Suddenly, she raised her voice and asked, "Mr. Dot, how will you judge the duel?" The rest of her Red Team members zipped their mouths once she shouted and waited intently for Mr. Dot's reply.

"Wow, this is a coincidence! The White Team also asked the same question! I will answer both teams at the same time..." Mr. Dot paused for a few seconds before he spoke again, "Since it is a duel, it shall end when one of the party dies."

B.Rabbit staggered at that remark and nearly fell off Lin Sanjiu's shoulder. The members of the Red Team sitting in their small circle immediately fell silent. Considering the 50% chance of dying, the importance of their abilities or items diminished. However, due to their previous behavior where they nearly got into a fight trying to be the chosen contestant, the current atmosphere was still very tense. Everyone was trying to find a way to excuse themselves discreetly, and Old Wang was the first to speak, "If the opposite team send out the old woman, I'll be the contestant."

The members of the White Team were mostly at their prime age. With his outstanding physique, Hai Tianqing looked menacing no matter where he stood. The long-legged woman with a red mini-skirt was tall and feisty. The remaining members, including Hu Changzai, were also healthy young men. Only that woman who looked old beyond her years seemed like the weakest link.

Hearing his words, the others naturally understood what he meant, and faint, superficial smiles appeared on their faces. Just when the Red Team was still undecided, Mr. Dot raised his voice

and unexpectedly said, "Okay! Our White Team have decided on their contestant. Can the contestant please walk up to the starting point! Red Team, you still have two minutes."

The members of the Red Team turned their heads to look at the White Team. An average-looking young man who was about 1.8m walked toward the starting point. He grinned at the Red Team and loosened his neck and shoulders as he reached the starting point. Once he stood in position, he suddenly slammed his fist on the ground. The impact it caused drove away a lot of the remaining white fog in the arena. It was so strong that even the Red Team could feel the tremors. When he straightened himself, there was a hole beside the square he was standing in, and that hole was the size of a human's head.

The Red Team grew silent when they saw his simple but effective threat. It might be painful for them to lose their items but the risk of dying was worse...

"Well, I'll participate," Surprising, Lin Sanjiu volunteered while everyone kept quiet.

The others looked relieved as if they had just been saved. Lara smiled with her pallid face, "Ah, Miss Lin, you're confident in your combat abilities? I'm so envious, but please be careful."

"How could we let a woman like you... Sigh... Fine, we can't do anything if you insist," Chen Fan added. Meanwhile, Old Wang just chuckled.

Zhong Junkai raised his brow and said, "Miss Lin, you don't have to risk your life just because of those prizes..."

"It's alright. I've already made up my mind." Lin Sanjiu smiled at him, her amber eyes shone beautifully. After that, she stood up and looked at her team members, "I guess no one has any objections? If you support my decision to participate, please raise your hands. After all, the rules stated that the contestant must get the votes from their team members."

Four arms rose one after the other. After a long hesitation, a tiny rabbit paw rose. B.Rabbit whispered in Lin Sanjiu's ear, "Hey, are you confident about this? If you fight using that useless ability of yours, you might just die immediately..."

Lin Sanjiu glared at him, "We'll just have to see how it goes. I still have some confidence in fighting."

Anxious, B.Rabbit wanted to say more but was interrupted. "Our Red Team have also decided on their contestant! Could the contestant from the Red Team also proceed to the starting point?"

Like the ending point, the square for the starting point did not have a question mark symbol. There was only a simple "Start" in it.

Even though there were 34 squares between them, they were not far from each other. She could even see the young man's exceptionally lengthy eyebrows. The young man grinned cheekily at her as if he had a hidden trick up his sleeve. Now that the contestants were in position, it was time for the teams to hand over their offerings. There were five remaining members in both red and white teams. Just as how Lin Sanjiu received the reward from the treasure chest, the members went into the white fog successively, thus no one knew what the other had offered. When each of them came out from the fog, they all had complex expressions, just like new investors who were uncertain about their investments.

"For the first round, I received five Special Items from the White Team and five Special Items from the Red Team. For these precious prizes, do your best, contestants!" Mr. Dot announced gleefully after all the prizes have been gathered. Lin Sanjiu was quite surprised by the outcome. She did not expect that everyone in the arena had a Special Item to offer. There wasn't even a single Active Skill being offered in this first round.

"Sigh. That's it? I thought that the other team would offer some Active Skills..." Chen Fan even mumbled disappointedly. He was

not the only one who was disappointed. Lin Sanjiu could see that the atmosphere in the White Team was similar.

"Is everyone ready? The first game[Your Fate Depends on Sugoroku]will officially begin now!"

While Mr. Dot spoke, B.Rabbit, who was missing a collar from his neck, stood on his two hind legs, watching Lin Sanjiu nervously.

Both teams were still unable to hear their opponents so everyone could only hear Mr. Dot. "Alright, our White Team contestant has already informed me about his chosen number. Could the contestant from the Red Team decide on a number?"

"One square," Lin Sanjiu replied without thinking.

In this game, the smallest number was one and they couldn't choose zero, neither could they force the opponent to move backward... thus she could predict that the opponent would also say one.

"Okay, I will now announce the chosen number from both teams..." Mr. Dot said even louder, "One step forward for the White Team... and one step forward for the Red Team!"

As expected, both teams made their opponents move only one step forward. Lin Sanjiu and the young man caught each other's gaze, they quickly averted their eyes and took a step forward, landing on the first square.

"Ding Dong!" she heard a familiar sound. The question mark symbol disappeared from under her feet, and a cartoon of a crying man and a dog appeared in the square. Before Lin Sanjiu's confusion appeared on her face, Mr. Dot suddenly said, "Ah, both teams are very unlucky! The contestant of the White Team has knocked down an old man. To pay for the old man's medical fee, the White Team loses a prize!"

The members of both the Red and White team were all stunned. As they were all distracted by the unique rules of this game, they'd

all forgotten that there were chance and community chest cards in Monopoly, and that landing on certain tiles could mean a reward or a penalty — such as winning five million on the lottery or being dragged off by the police...

Without considering the contestants' feelings, Mr. Dot continued, "Even if the White Team win this round, they will only be able to collect back four items and the five items from the other team... The confiscated prize will be added to a random treasure chest. This will become an individual prize for the person who opens that chest."

[Individual prize... That means that it is not part of the team prize?]

"As for the Red Team..."

Lin Sanjiu immediately listened very carefully.

"The contestant from the Red Team had accidentally stepped on a dog's tail. The dog chased her through two streets, so she lost her shoes. To buy a pair of new shoes, the Red Team had to sell off one of the prizes. That prize is also added to one of the treasure chests."

It had only been three minutes since the game commenced, yet both teams had already lost one prize each. Right now, no matter who won, they would only get back four of their own items and another four from the other team, that's "only" 8 items in total.

Even though the two items have been added to the treasure chests, nobody knew how they could obtain the treasure chests and whether they could even get the right treasure chest with the prizes was already a problem. The expressions of the members from both teams grew somber.

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"Okay, Team White has already given me their number. Now, it's Red Team's turn," Mr. Dot called out a second time.

After Mr. Dot had revealed the choices for the first round, both Lin Sanjiu and that young man stood in the first squares with slightly tensed expression. As she looked at the question mark symbol on the second square, she frowned. [What is under that question mark?] She couldn't help thinking to herself.

"One square," she gave the same answer.

"For the second turn, one step forward for the White Team, and one step forward for the Red Team!"

When Mr. Dot finished his sentence, the non-participating members from each team looked as if they had predicted what would happen. The design of the game seemed totally meaningless to all of them. Since the number of steps forward was determined by one's opponent, it was logical that both players would choose the slowest route forward for their opponent, until the finishing point where they will fight it out.

[But is that really the case?] Lin Sanjiu pondered as she stepped into the second square. [If the game could only be determined by a duel, then wouldn't it make more sense for the game to be a pure fighting match?]

Once again, she heard the familiar "Ding Dong!" The question mark symbol beneath her feet disappeared and was replaced by a picture of a jam-packed road. Lin Sanjiu looked up and saw her opponent's bewildered, frowning face.

"Oh dear!" Mr. Dot exclaimed in an exaggerated manner, "Just when the two contestants stepped into the next square, the new year bell has rung! As the contestant from the White Team set off

some fireworks illegally, he was fined. -1 point for the White Team!"

Before anyone could process the fact that the New Year had arrived, the members of both team looked toward the fog with rather blank expressions — Shortly after, unlike the White Team, the Red Team quickly became excited, and all their faces lit up.

On the other hand, the young man from the White Team looked almost ready to rush into the white fog to argue with Mr. Dot. "Hey! There's something wrong here! Didn't you say that we will get one point when we win the game, how could you just deduct our points whenever you want? Doesn't that mean that even if I win this game, it'll be for nothing!" he raged.

Hu Changzai and Hai Tianqing, who were standing behind that man, exchanged a glance with each other when they heard his rant. They did not know if they should be happy or concerned. Despite their conflicted emotions, they did not show how they really felt — Both concealed their true expressions after they saw Lin Sanjiu's signal. They did it so well that none of the members of the White Team realized that they actually had friends in the Red Team.

"Have you forgotten what I said in the rules regarding gaining and losing points?" Mr. Dot's tone remained unchanged as he maintained his stance. "If you want to earn more points, you'll have to try harder to look for ways to gain them!"

The young man spat angrily, and his eyes bore into the ten over squares in front of him, as if he could spot the difference between the multiple question mark symbols on the ground.

"As for our Red Team contestant..." Mr. Dot continued, "too many people wanted to watch the New Year fireworks, so she was unfortunately stuck in a traffic jam. She will have to skip the next turn."

When they heard the word "skip", their smiles fell off their faces.

"You must be kidding?" Lara jumped up, "If she skips a turn, that means that she won't move forward the next round, right? Then, what's there to compete? Wouldn't that mean that the other team has already won!"

According to the rules, the smallest number than Lin Sanjiu could call out was one. If she was one step behind her opponent, and each of them could only move one step per turn, this would mean that she had already lost.

"No, that's not right!" Zhong Junkai's brows furrowed as he thought carefully about it, and he suddenly said, "This 'skip' penalty could determine whether a team wins or loses. It's not possible that it exists only on our side, right? That would be too unfair... I'm sure that there is also that penalty on the opponent's route!"

Everyone thought that what he said made sense. Old Wang clapped his hands and agreed wholeheartedly: "Xiao Zhong is right! I think the crucial point of this game is the squares with the 'skip' penalty. Whoever is unluckier would step on more of these penalties and lose the game."

B.Rabbit shot a glance at the other and did not say a word. When everyone was introducing themselves previously, no one even bothered to ask for his name. He felt as if they didn't treat him as one of the members but rather as Lin Sanjiu's pet. When he thought about this, he decided to speak as little as possible and sat down quietly like any normal rabbit. While the four members of the Red Team discussed a little more, Mr. Dot revealed the outcome of the third turn, "One step forward for the White Team and the Red Team remains in the same spot."

At that point, the young man's fury over the point deduction had abated. He looked at Lin Sanjiu intentionally as he stepped on the third square smugly.

"During the year-end company dinner, the contestant from the

White Team won a treasure chest in a lucky draw. But when he looked at it, he realized that it was a dirty, broken chest which was marked by the label 'Chest of Misfortune'. White Team contestant, do you wish to open this chest?"

No one expected that the contestant could actually choose whether to open a treasure chest that was on the square. The young man seemed apprehensive and found that he could not decide. After some time, he turned to his team members, seeking their opinion. Even though he could not make any conversations with them, they could see each other, so they only needed to nod or shake their heads. The old woman nodded her head, but the others shook their heads, frowning.

Since it was clearly stated that it was a "chest of misfortune", why should he take the risk?

The young man turned back and said something, gritting his teeth. From his reaction, Lin Sanjiu guessed that he gave up opening the chest.

He made the right decision, and this was proved by Mr. Dot's words. "The contestant from the White Team decided not to open the chest. The venomous snake in the chest was unable to bite anyone." The young man couldn't help sighing a breath of relief when he thought about the possible consequences of getting bitten. Ever since the game started, both teams had suffered heavy penalties; he felt lucky just to have avoided that calamity.

For the next turn, both contestants moved forward one step as predicted. This time, the Red Team lost another prize because according to the square, they borrowed money from a loan shark. Whereas, the White Team had to skip a turn because their car broke down. Just as what Zhong Junkai said, there were "skip" penalties on both routes.

When it was the fourth turn, both contestants were in the 4th square, so they were at the same pace once again. Both contestants

had better luck for this turn — the contestant from the Red Team rested at a hotel and did not win or lose anything; the contestant from the White Team found a treasure chest and received an "Undo 1 move".

Current stats:

Red Team: 3 prizes, -1 point, a chance to "PASS", 4th square.

White Team: 4 prizes, -1 point, a chance to "Undo 1 move", bound by a -1 curse, 4th square.

After the fifth turn, both contestants moved another 1 square forward, and each lost a prize. The Red Team watched helplessly as the prizes they had offered was reduced to only two items, and their expressions turned sour. Chen Fan even suspected that this setup was just a scam to cheat people out of their items — but that was just his conjecture, and ultimately, he couldn't muster up his courage to enter the white fog and confront Mr. Dot about it.

Both contestants went through seven turns in this fashion still maintaining their tied position, suffering losses with every step. Even though the scenarios behind each question mark symbol was different, almost all of them had bad outcomes. It was to the extent that they felt lucky when they set on a square with no particular effects. Everyone seemed to have forgotten their goal to win items from the other teams and were instead concerned about reducing their losses.

Current stats after 7 turns:

Red Team: 2 prizes, -2 points, a chance to "PASS", a chance to "Take a 5-minutes break mid-game", 7th square.

White Team: 3 prizes, -2 points, a chance to "Undo 1 move", bound by a -1 curse, 7th square.

When Mr. Dot was about to announce the outcome of the eighth turn, all the members of the Red Team were already sitting on the ground, looking at the game listlessly, occasionally making some

conversation. They were all dejected and even bored with the game. Anyway, both contestants had already decided to move forward one step per turn, suffering losses with each step, so there was really nothing they could look forward to. So, they had already decided to just wait for the duel at the end.

With such an atmosphere, B.Rabbit was the first one to realize that something was different because Mr. Dot did not announce the outcome of the eighth turn even after some time. Feeling curious, he looked and saw that Lin Sanjiu was facing the white fog. She seemed to be talking to someone — and Mr. Dot was the only person in that direction.

Even though they couldn't hear what she was saying, Lin Sanjiu's action quickly drew the attention of the members of both teams. After a while, Mr. Dot suddenly said, "Okay." Then, they heard nothing else.

"Huh? Why does it seem like Miss Lin is talking to the other contestant?" Lara muttered to herself after watching them for some time, "Did she just made a request to Mr. Dot to allow her to speak to the other contestant?"

When they heard what she said, the other members of the Red Team watched what happened in astonishment. They were unable to see Lin Sanjiu's face as her back was against them, but they could clearly see the face of the contestant from the White Team. First, they saw the young man looking quite shocked. After that, he frowned and eyed Lin Sanjiu suspiciously. Observing her from the back, Lin Sanjiu seemed rather worked up as she gestured her arms wildly for some time. After they had both chatted for a long time, the young man nodded hesitantly, and they both seemed to have reached an agreement.

Once she got the cooperation of her opponent, Lin Sanjiu immediately heaved a sigh of relief, and her shoulders relaxed. Shortly after, Mr. Dot announced the outcome of the eighth turn with great curiosity and suspicion from both teams. "Three steps

forward for the White Team. One step forward for the Red Team!"

Chapter 75: Your Fate Depends on Sugoroku

(4)

Rain intertwined with white steam fell continuously from the sky like silver threads. The water droplets turned to steam the moment they reached the ground, adding to the already thick white fog around them. The Red Team stood surrounded by fog, and in that instant, they really hoped that they misheard those words because their ears were filled with water.

"The White Team gets to move three steps forward?" Chen Fan was the first to leap up. If it wasn't for Mr. Dot, he would have rushed up and grabbed Lin Sanjiu and shake her till she came to her senses. "What's that woman doing? Why did she let the White Team move three steps!"

With the exception of B.Rabbit, the other members of the Red Team had the same disgruntled expressions. As if to rub salt in the wound, the young man from the White Team took three steps forward quickly. After that, he paused and turned to Lin Sanjiu and the Red Team deliberately and showed them his beaming face. He pointed to Lin Sanjiu and said something then shook his head as if lamenting Lin Sanjiu's stupidity.

While the Red Team was bewildered and angered by the outcome, Mr. Dot spoke just at the right time, "What a pity! Who would have guessed that the strategy from the Red Team contestant failed!"

"Let me explain to everyone what has just happened. The contestant from the Red Team made a request to speak to the contestant from the White Team. She wanted them to cooperate for the next turn so that they wouldn't just move one step per turn because it was obvious that it was just detrimental to both parties. She argued that it was better for them to duel as soon as possible than to drag on and suffer more losses."

"The contestant from the White Team agreed after hearing her proposal and told her that he would call for three squares. However, the contestant from the White Team broke his promise and only called for 1 square while the contestant from the Red Team complied with their agreement and called for three squares. As a result, we got to see this discrepancy."

After Mr. Dot finished his explanation, Zhong Junkai's face grew red with anger, he glared at the young man from the White Team and shouted, "Mr. Dot, isn't there any sort of punishment for such an agreement violation?"

"Even though it is morally wrong, but that is not in the rules," both teams heard Mr. Dot's reply loud and clear.

"What... But that's cheating..." Zhong Junkai was about to rush over to protest, but his girlfriend held his hand. He turned and looked at the others, with some doubts. He noticed their darkened expressions.

Old Wang clicked his tongue as he commented softly, "That Miss Lin looks cold-blooded but she actually just a naive woman. That was a good suggestion but can't she see that this is not the right occasion?!"

"That's right," Chen Fan added, "she was just asking to be cheated! It would have been embarrassing if that bastard didn't take the chance to backstab her."

Zhong Junkai's eyes widened and was dumbfounded. After a few seconds, he turned to look at his girlfriend. "Please don't confront Mr. Dot. What will I do if something happened to you..." Lara pleaded quietly. Her words were like a breeze which instantly extinguished the flames of Zhong Junkai's fury. He looked at everyone for a moment and finally sighed, saying nothing. B.Rabbit was resting at a side with his eyes closed. He did open his eyes to take a glance but quickly closed them, as if he was falling asleep.

Mr. Dot spoke again as if he knew that their conversations ended, "The contestant from the White Team advanced three steps. He reached a lottery booth, bought a lottery ticket, and won a treasure chest. White Team contestant, do you wish to open this chest?" The young man replied gleefully, and everyone could tell that he said, "Yes."

"Congratulations, you've received +2 points! However, due to the Witch's Curse, you've only received 1 point... And now your score is -1 point."

Even though he only received 1 point, it was already a great surprise to him — the young man did not expect that his choice would bring him this much luck. A broad smile immediately surfaced on his face, and his expression relaxed considerably.

"The contestant from the Red Team displayed extraordinary bravery on the public bus, she caught a pervert, a gangster, and a thief. The police awarded her with +3 points. Now, the Red Team's score is 1 point."

The young man's smile went rigid.

Current stats after 8 turns:

Red Team: 2 prizes, 1 point, a chance to "PASS", a chance to "Take a 5-minutes break mid-game", 8th square.

White Team: three prizes, -1 point, a chance to "Undo 1 move", bound by a -1 curse, 10th square.

"Haha! She's quite lucky! In one turn, our score went up to 1 point!" Old Wang slapped his own thigh as he laughed, his wet round belly wobbled with his laughter. "If we think about it, the young chap is still 6 squares away from the finishing point. If he steps on a few skips, we might still have a winning chance..."

Chen Fan nodded his head in agreement and just as he said, "I hope so—" He saw Lin Sanjiu from the corner of his eyes and was flabbergasted. He was not the only one, everyone in the arena was

a little shocked. This was because Lin Sanjiu repeated the same action. She called for Mr. Dot and said something. Then, she turned to the young man and talked to him for a long time after she got Mr. Dot's approval.

As they could not hear what she said, the members of the Red Team could only stare hard at the young man's face. They scrutinized every micro-expression and every detail, down to the water droplets which rolled down his face.

The young man looked as though he couldn't believe what he was hearing. He stood on the spot stunned for quite some time. He stared at Lin Sanjiu from head to toe a couple of times before he finally nodded his head again. Lara's heart thumped anxiously, as she pulled her boyfriend's sleeve, "Honey, she... she wouldn't, right? How can there be such a stupid person?"

The members of the Red Team could only think of one possibility, and their faces turned pale.

Once again, Mr. Dot announced with his ever-enthusiastic tone, "Three steps forward for the White Team. One step forward for the Red Team."

If everyone could hear the contestant from the White Team, they would hear his loud, obnoxious laughter as he moved three steps forward in a hurry. He was already on the 13th square and was only three steps away from victory. Chen Fan stood up. Popped veins laced his forehead as he sprinted toward the contestants' field. Unexpectedly, no one in his team went to stop him. But before he could reach Lin Sanjiu, a sudden flash of lightning came from within the white fog. It struck him directly, and a smell of burnt flesh pervaded the air.

Lin Sanjiu looked at Chen Fan indifferently. He was quite near to her so she could see that smoke was rising from his clothes. She ignored him and turned toward the young man who was reaching the finish point soon.

"I am giving the Red Team a warning, if anyone tries to get close to the contestants again, the punishment will be death."

With that said, Lin Sanjiu knew that Chen Fan would definitely walk back to the team compliantly without even looking behind her.

"The contestant from the White Team found 1 point from his grandmother's inheritance, +1 point for the White Team. The current score for the White Team is 0," Mr. Dot revealed the prizes and punishment for the current turn. "When the contestant from the Red Team went to the bank to deposit some money, she was the lucky 100th customer, so she won a treasure chest. Do you wish to open this chest?"

"Yes," Lin Sanjiu replied mildly as she looked at the square in front of her.

"Congratulations, the contestant from the Red Team won a prize!"

Despite the peculiar reactions from the others, Lin Sanjiu remained composed.

Current stats after 8 turns:

Red Team: 2 prizes, 1 point, a chance to "PASS", a chance to "Take a 5-minutes break mid-game", 8th square.

White Team: three prizes, -1 point, a chance to "Undo 1 move", bound by a -1 curse, 10th square.

Current stats after 9 turns:

Red Team: 2 prizes, 1 point, a chance to "PASS", a chance to "Take a 5-minutes break mid-game", 9th square. Contestant Lin Sanjiu received 1 individual prize.

White Team: 3 prizes, 0 points, a chance to "Undo 1 move", 13th square.

For the next 10th, 11th, and 12th turn, both teams moved only one

square per turn.

From the looks of it, Lin Sanjiu already realized her mistake and didn't give her opponent another chance to deceive her — unfortunately, there was already a four-square distance between them. The outcome of the game seemed fixed, and there was nothing they could do.

However, both parties got quite a few rewards in the three turns. They either got treasure chests or some advantage, so everyone was somewhat ecstatic.

Current stats after 12 turns:

Red Team: 2 prizes, 3 points, a chance to "PASS", a chance to "Take a 5-minutes break mid-game", 12th square. Contestant Lin Sanjiu received 2 individual prizes.

White Team: 3 prizes, 2 points, a chance to "Undo 1 move", a chance to "get external assistance", 16th square, White Team Contestant received 1 individual prize.

The White Team was already on the 16th square, that meant that the game "Your Fate Depends on Sugoroku" would end in the next turn, with the White Team as the winner. None of the members of the Red Team looked fine. It was apparent to them that Lin Sanjiu lost on purpose to avoid death duel.

"For the 13th turn, White Team stays on the spot. One step forward for the Red Team."

[Huh?]

That announcement drew everyone's attention, some of them even looked shocked. Didn't Mr. Dot say that the contestants cannot call for o?

"The contestant from the Red Team used the chance to 'Pass' and did not have to choose a number for this turn. Therefore, the contestant from the White Team will just have to remain on the spot," Mr. Dot cleared up the confusion kindly.

The young man was just one step away from the finishing point, he looked at Lin Sanjiu with a frown. [This last struggle had no purpose other than delaying the inevitable, right?]

Lin Sanjiu averted his gaze and listened to Mr. Dot, "The contestant from the Red Team accidentally spilled some wine on an old man during a company dinner, so she got to know the third richest man in the world. In the end, they got married, so the contestant from the Red Team got a wedding gift of +1 point and a treasure chest. Do you wish to open this chest?"

"Yes."

"Congratulations! The contestant from the Red Team received one individual prize!"

The young man's eyes widened, and he quickly said something to Mr. Dot in an agitated manner.

"Oh? The contestant from the White Team chose to use his chance to 'undo 1 move'!" Everyone was taken aback when they heard Mr. Dot's words: "Unfortunately, as your opponent determines your steps, you can only move backward if your opponent uses that chance to 'undo 1 move'... If that is the case, do you still want to use it?"

Chapter 76: Your Fate Depends on Sugoroku (Revealed)

The situation suddenly became confusing.

"He can clearly win with the next step, so why would he want to go backward?" this question surfaced in the audience mind, and many of them couldn't help furrowing their brows. They wondered if they missed anything. The rules were clear enough — the person who reached the finishing point first would get +1 point and the prizes offered by their opponent — and even though the Red Team only had two prizes left, it was a guaranteed reward... If he moved backward, there was a chance he might get bitten by a dog or some other new penalty.

If so, they wondered why the contestant from the White Team looked that regretful.

"For the 14th turn, one step forward for the Red Team and one step forward for the White Team!

[The game has ended,] this was the first thought which appeared in everybody's mind. They would know very quickly what the outcome was for this weird game. Somehow, for this turn, Mr. Dot had changed the sequence of the announcement, but this was only noticed by Lin Sanjiu and the contestant from the White Team.

With heavy-laden steps and an ashen face, the young man walked onto the square which was labeled "Victory!" On the other hand, Lin Sanjiu took one step forward onto the 14th square. The question mark disappeared replaced by a picture of a wallet. "The Red Team contestant found a wallet, she opened it and received one individual prize! The White Team contestant reached the finishing point and received the final reward for the game!"

"The White Team gains +1 point, and the team receives the two remaining prizes offered by the Red Team. Congratulations to the

White Team for winning the first game!"

Mr. Dot's words accompanied by a celebratory trumpet tune and sounds of fireworks rang out muffled in the humid arena as if attempting to hype up the atmosphere. However, it was futile. No one from both teams looked happy, both teams gathered in their individual circles and started to discuss with agitated expressions.

When the five members of the Red Team saw Lin Sanjiu exercising her shoulders as she walked back to them, they stood up from their circle, each with different expressions. They approached her, unable to resist questioning her about the situation: "Miss Lin, what just happened?"

"If I had known that you would let the opponent win on purpose because you were afraid to die, I would have—"

"Hey, what's with you? How could you let that chap bluff you twice! You have caused us all our prizes!"

While the others made a racket about the issue, Lin Sanjiu frowned and shoved Chen Fan's finger away from her face before she asked coldly, "Are you all idiots?"

"Huh?" Everyone around her was stunned because they didn't expect words like that from this loser.

Lara glared at her. "Miss Lin, how could you scold others whenever you like? And what do you mean by that?"

"Did all of you really fail to see something so obvious?" Lin Sanjiu chose intentionally to sound offensive. This drew their attention and made them shut their mouths. She laughed in a mocking tone, "Don't tell me that all of you still think the goal of the game is to reach the finishing point?"

The others were shocked by her words. After a while, Lara muttered, "What did you just say... But didn't the rules..."

"The rules and introduction to the game are just distractions!" Lin Sanjiu sneered and carried B.Rabbit onto her shoulder. "I

realized midway that there were two crucial points in this game."

The four other members kept quiet as she explained. "First, the method of advancing is different from Monopoly. The biggest difference is that it is determined by one's opponent. Therefore, it must be a key point." She paused and then slowly continued, "This must be what you have in mind, right?"

[Wasn't this right?] Aside from the four members, B.Rabbit was also confounded by what she said. He tried recalling every detail in the game.

"If you think that way, you've been deceived. That rule where a contestant decides his or her opponent's steps was made to cover-up a crucial element. That is, both players will move forward at the same time." Lin Sanjiu looked at the confused faces around her and said softly, "That means that when one of the contestants is just one step from winning, the other contestant will still be able to move one step forward — just like what happened at the end."

Just as described, Lin Sanjiu could still take a step forward when the contestant from the white team reached the finishing point. In a normal game of Monopoly, the Red Team would have stopped and admitted their loss once the White Team reached the finishing point...

"Even if that was the case, what does it impact?" Zhong Junkai couldn't help asking as he seemed to finally have an inkling of what Lin Sanjiu was hinting at.

"This will lead to the second crucial point, the prizes and penalties in each square," Lin Sanjiu turned to look at the White Team as she said this. The young man was also surrounded by his teammates who were also trying to find out more about the situation. However, the young man did not look as collected as Lin Sanjiu; instead, he looked crestfallen.

"At first, we suffered seven consecutive losses with each step, so I began to find it strange. If both teams lost all the prizes and

chances, chalking up a massive negative score, then the whole game would become pointless. Wouldn't it be faster if the outcome was determined by an immediate duel?

"By logic, I deduced that there should be squares with rewards since there were squares with penalties... If the first half of the route were all 'unlucky' squares, it would naturally mean that there was a high chance that the squares in the second half of the route were all 'lucky' squares. Based on this deduction, I did a little experiment.

"I got permission from Mr. Dot to speak to the contestant and was 'fooled' by him once — as you've witnessed. But since we both received rewards for that turn, it confirmed my suspicion. The second half of the route was all squares with rewards.

"There was another reason why I let the other contestant move two squares ahead of me. I was afraid that he would also realize this secret and needed to distract him. What better way for me to do this than to raise his hopes that he was winning? As expected, the contestant from the White Team failed to see through the ruse.

"The first point I brought up was the reason why I didn't want the other contestant to find out the secret about the route.

"The person who understood these two points first would gain the option to let their opponent take a few more steps and reach the finishing point first. There are no rewards at the finishing point, whereas, the contestant from the losing team could still get one more reward as they could step into a square within the route.

"Now, do you understand? The point of this game is to lose the game after gaining a slight advantage...

"On top of that, I think I was lucky because we still have a 'PASS'... When I made the second request, I already confirmed with Mr. Dot that the White Team will be stuck in the same square for the particular turn when I use it. He would gain nothing for that turn, and I would get another reward when I moved forward.

In addition to that, he couldn't even use the same method against me.

"This leads to the current situation. Even though I lost the game, I received two more chances of getting a reward. You can look at the score."

End game stats:

Red Team: 0 prizes, 4 points, a chance to "PASS", a chance to "Take a 5-minutes break mid-game", Contestant Lin Sanjiu received 4 individual prizes.

White Team: 5 prizes, 3 points, a chance to "Undo 1 move", a chance to "get external assistance", White Team Contestant received 1 individual prize.

"Oh, it's true..." Zhong Junkai mumbled, "We lost the game, but our score is higher."

After hearing this complicated explanation, Chen Fan hesitated for a moment before he exchanged a glance with Old Wang. The latter nodded, so he immediately slapped his thigh and shouted, "What's the use of having a higher score? That is intangible... We have lost all the five items that we offered for this game!"

"Who says so?" Lin Sanjiu smiled faintly, "Didn't I get back four items?"

Old Wang's eyes lit, but he quickly hid his expression and flashed her a shrewd smile, "Aren't those four items your individual prizes? Even though they were our things, they now belong to you —"

At that precise moment, Mr. Dot's voice rang out loudly, interrupting Old Wang. "Could both contestants from each team come up to receive your individual prizes now!"

Under the sudden scathing gaze of the other four members, Lin Sanjiu turned and walked into the white fog calmly. The rabbit on her shoulder had been holding back his words, and now he finally

found his chance. He asked quickly, "Hey, are you planning to return the prizes to them? Did you know that during the game, they..."

"Don't worry. I left out a detail." Lin Sanjiu rubbed the rabbit's wet forehead, "I mentioned that the point of the game was to 'lose after gaining a slight advantage', right? That's only half true. Because, the situation is definitely advantageous to me, but an absolute loss for them."

"Within this entire challenge, there exist multiple areas of contention between members of the same team; since I can't trust them wholly, yet I can't constantly guard against them... this was something troubling to me. In the end, I decided that I could use these items to at least keep them on my side."

After she brought up this topic, she crooked her head and thought through it once more. She nodded affirmatively when she felt that there shouldn't be any problems with her plan.

B. Rabbit looked at her carefully, then he smacked his lips, "Ha. I didn't know that you actually had some sense."

Lin Sanjiu only knew instinctively that she could use those four items to her advantage, but she didn't think too deeply about it, so she looked back at the rabbit blankly. Just then, she reached the white fog. She placed B.Rabbit down and walked into the depths of the fog. Like her previous experience, she saw a normal wooden chest sitting silently in front of her.

Chapter 77: Please Check Your Individual Prizes

The air was filled with steam, making it a little difficult to breathe. Everything looked hazy like being in the bathroom during winter. The warm rain had tapered off, leaving only a hair-fine drizzle wafting through the white fog, and this made everyone uncomfortable as their half-dried clothes clung onto their bodies.

Under such a peculiar "hot bath"-like weather, everything seemed like it would take double the effort to complete. It created an atmosphere where everyone couldn't help feeling a little lethargic. This was the reason why Li Zhijun was lazing around like a sloth, doing nothing.

"Are you going to come with me?" Hei Zeji, standing not far from him, shouted. Hei Zeji's body was surprisingly dry.

"Come on... Let me rest for a while more..." Li Zhijun showed his listless face, "Besides, being wet is super uncomfortable..." Li Zhijun had always hated rain. Without the same abilities as his companion, Li Zhijun had no choice but to squint his eyes as he suffered the torture of each raindrop. There was no sign of his usual poise; instead, he looked like a wet little dog. He scanned the area in his sorry state. "Why don't we look for a place to hide from this rain?"

"There is currently only one activated Pocket Dimension nearby. Do you want to enter?" Hei Zeji asked as he lifted a brow, expressing some tolerance toward Li Zhijun.

Li Zhijun's eyes immediately brightened. "What sort of Pocket Dimension is it?"

"It's a game-type Pocket Dimension. I'll wait for you at the entrance."

Li Zhijun's face instantly reverted to its previous listless

expression. Entering a game-type Pocket Dimension meant walking into a trap directly. He would have to clear every stage with those unlucky people who were currently in it before he could come out... Even having a high combative advantage, did not mean much in such a Pocket Dimension.

He pulled himself up, sighing in despair. He took out a single small lens from nowhere and peered through it with one eye into the white fog just some distance away. "Huh? It is an open-air game-type Pocket Dimension. The host of this Pocket Dimension must be a cheapskate... Oh, it looks quite interesting. It seems like they're celebrating the New Year... Huh?"

He put down the lens in his hand and turned to look at Hei Zeji saying, "Your same species is in there."

His bad-tempered companion retorted with throbbing veins, "Don't use a term like 'same species'!" Pausing for a moment, Hei Zeji eyes drifted afar. "Isn't that woman too unlucky? She actually got drawn into two Pocket Dimensions in such a short time..."

Even though both were discussing about Lin Sanjiu who was trapped not far from them, they didn't show any intention to go over to help. Li Zhijun kept the lens properly and started walking in the opposite direction of the Pocket Dimension. Just then, he commented lazily, "Anyway, it must be difficult for you, Growth types."

"Huh?" He Zeji answered curtly, sounding surprised.

"Each of you has such Potential Growth Value, but you are all weaklings during the initial phase. Those abilities are really useless... That woman, what was her ability? Umm, storing items into cards, right?"

Hei Zeji wanted to refute what he said, but when he thought about it carefully, he realized that Lin Sanjiu's card ability could only be used as a glorified backpack.

"I heard a rumor that many Growth types don't survive past three worlds because they are too weak at the start..." Li Zhijun looked over at Hei Zeji inquisitively, "Is it true?"

"Yes," the man answered even though he was clearly offended.

"What was your first ability?" Li Zhijun edged closer to Hei Zeji as his eyes sparkled with interest. "Aren't there quite a few Growth-types in some of those high-level worlds? How did they survive? And, how did you survive?"

"If I answer you, will you stop being so annoying?"

Li Zhijun smiled happily and nodded.

"Basically, all of the powerful Growth-types survive their initial phase with the help of things." As if recalling something from his past, Hei Zeji threw a glance at the Pocket Dimension which was getting further and further away from them. "For Growth-types, their first ability usually has little combat value, so they have to rely on Special Items or companions to survive. If we look at it from another perspective, they need luck."

He lowered his head and looked at his left hand. There was a deep cross-shaped scar on his muscular forearm. "But at that time, I had neither of those."

"Huh? Then, how did you survive?" Li Zhijun was astonished, "I remembered that the world you were originally from was a—"

"It was an A-level world," Hei Zeji finished Li Zhijun's sentence as if he knew what his companion wanted to say. He continued, "While trying to survive, I gradually gained some insights about killing."

Li Zhijun stopped walking. "Ah Ji, what were you before the New World descended."

"A normal high school student," after saying that, Hei Zeji ignored the startled expression behind him and continued walking straight ahead.

"Hey, wait up!" Li Zhijun shouted and quickly chased up to him. Very quickly, they both disappeared into the fog...

Lin Sanjiu did not know this, but she was actually considered quite lucky. At that moment, Lin Sanjiu stared at the wooden chest in front of her, she was stunned, and her mouth was wide open.

Even though she knew that Special Items from the New World were quite unusual, the things she saw were too...

Individual Prize 1: That spring, when the cherry blossoms fell, your sweet laughter melted my world.

Individual Prize 2: A bag of cat litter.

Individual Prize 3: An inedible lunch.

Individual Prize 4: Oh My God! My wallet is missing!

When Lin Sanjiu opened the chest, she saw a fast-food container covered with beautiful drawings and a bag of cat litter on top of it. When she walked closer and listened, she heard a gentle, delicate laughter beside the bag of cat litter, as if it was some sort of paranormal encounter. As if expressed the "missing" factor, all three items — including that voice — was stuffed to the left of the chest, leaving an empty space on the right.

If she didn't stick her hands into the chest to touch the items, changing them into cards, Lin Sanjiu would probably think that Mr. Dot missed out an item. From this collection, she could tell that the item the team lost was B.Rabbit's leather collar.

"What a pity... that white leather collar was quite cute..." Before Mr. Dot prompted her to leave, she asked, "Mr. Dot, do I have the authority to decide what to do with these individual prizes?"

"Of course, they already belong to you."

After getting the reply she expected, Lin Sanjiu stood up and read the four cards as she slowly walked out.

[That spring, when the cherry blossoms fell, your sweet laughter

melted my world]

A Special Item from the New World

Description: As a gentle breeze blew, a sweet teenage girl laughed gently as she looked at her first love. Ah! Just a sound is what you'll consider a priceless treasure... This precious item was retrieved from the memories of a pathetic 35-year-old single man, who never dated after the end of his first relationship at 16.

Instructions: When[That spring, when the cherry blossoms fell, your sweet laughter melted my world]is activated, it will affect the males who can hear it. The number of times this item can be used is dependent on how many times the user had been in love. [Single dogs](#) who have never been in any relationship before should just give up on this item.

Effect: This will remove any killing intent, hatred, tyranny... from the hearts of the listeners. Once they hear that teenage girl's innocent and beautiful voice, their inner thoughts will be cleansed for one minute, and within that minute, they will not have any ill intentions.

Remarks: This has totally no effect on females.

"Was this name given to this item to bring up the word count..." Lin Sanjiu said, and she looked at another card.

[Cat Litter]

Description: Animals in the feline family would cover their excretion with soil to hide their scent and whereabouts. Even though the color (bright orange) of this Cat Litter doesn't look like it can camouflage into any sort of environment, it can mysteriously conceal the user's tracks.

Instructions: Sprinkle a thin layer of cat litter over the place where you've walked passed or stayed, and with that, even super-elite hunters will not be able to find you.

Remarks: There are only 5 liters, so when you finish it, it's gone.

"Even though this is useful, it is subtly offensive..."

[An Inedible Lunch]

Description: This container is decorated with a myriad of colors and patterns, mixed with drawings of human eyes and skeleton. The design clearly strives to express a psychedelic vision that one only gets after eating magic mushrooms. There is a yellow warning label at the left corner of the box stating: "Toxic, do not consume." If you open the container, you will see a delicious-looking bento with an onion omelet, fried pork trotters, stir-fried Chinese broccoli and steam rice.

Instructions: Put it into your mouth and chew with your molars.

Effect: The person who eats this will die.

Remark: Only those who have seen the packaging can see the bento inside. It is impossible to feed someone this bento if you throw away or remove the packaging.

"Then, what the hell is this for?"

[Oh My God! My wallet is missing!]

Description: After taking the legendary Bus Route 300, he realized that his pants were stolen. Thus, the pathetic 35-year-old man was unable to meet his date in time. As he wallowed in his grief, this item was created from his intense emotions.

Instructions: After you ask your target, "Have you ever taken Bus Route 300 before?", this item will be activated.

Effect: The targeted party will share the experience of losing everything. This will freeze the target's Special Items for 15 minutes. The target will not be able to use their Special Items for 15 minutes.

Remarks: In principle, this is an item with unlimited use. However, it cannot be used on the same person twice.

Additional note: If the target has taken Bus Route 300 before but

was not pickpocketed, this item has no effect on that target.

"That pathetic man is really quite pitiful."

Lin Sanjiu's mouth twitched, and she was stunned when she suddenly thought of something. This item and[That spring, when the cherry blossoms fell, your sweet laughter melted my world]was clearly of the same... series. So, there was a high possibility that it came from the same person. When she thought about it, the owner of both items was obviously Zhong Junkai since no one had the reason to offer two items.

[He has that many items?] Lin Sanjiu pondered to herself as she walked out from the white fog. The moment she stepped out of the white fog, Mr. Dot announced, "Has everyone prepared themselves to participate in the next game?"

A slightly derogatory term used in China to describe singles.

Chapter 78: Meeting at the Crossroads (1)

"Since the first game was based entirely on luck, let's make the second game a little more interesting..." Mr. Dot's brisk voice traveled through the layers of steam yet retained its clarity as it reached everyone's ears. "Let me introduce to you the second game..."

"Red vs. White Challenge Second Game: [Meeting at the Crossroads].

"How to play: The boundary line in the middle will act as a divider, and a 5 by 5 grid will appear on both sides of the divider. There will be a total of 25 tiles on the grid. A screen will rise from the boundary line, blocking the view of the opposing team, so both teams won't know what's happening on the other side of the screen. After the screen is up, each member of both team will have to choose and stand on a tile."

Following Mr. Dot's first sentence, the two routes from the first game disappeared. On the red side, the route was replaced by a large grid with faint golden lines. A similar grid appeared on the white side, but the view of the white semicircle was quickly blocked by the rising black screen.

The vertical side of the large grid was labeled ABCDE, while the horizontal side was labeled 12345.

"Do you see the tiles now? Could contestant Lin and contestant Ai help me with this demonstration? Please stand on any random tile."

Lin Sanjiu threw a suspicious glance toward where Mr. Dot was, she chose cautiously and stood inside her chosen tile.

"Taking contestant Lin as an example... she is currently standing on column D, row 4, so the tile she's on is called D4. This is easy to understand, right?"

Everyone in the arena nodded as they couldn't help exploring the grid with their eyes.

"The contestant from the white team has also chosen his tile. Now, I'll lower the screen..."

The black screen was lowered, revealing to the Red Team, a young man from the White Team who was wearing a flowery shirt. Everyone from the Red Team immediately looked at the tiles on the ground as if on instinct.

"Contestant Ai is currently standing on column B, row 2, that is tile B2. Congratulations! During the last round of positioning, both of you didn't collide!" Mr. Dot clapped his hands enthusiastically while everyone else reacted with a bland silence. He continued, "If there are no collisions between the two teams, we will proceed to the second round of positioning. Please look downward..."

The black screen rose again blocking the view of the opposing team. "Ding Dong." Lin Sanjiu looked at her feet and found that she was standing on a line of words. She lifted one of her mountain boots hurriedly so she could read the words: "There is a +1 point reward on one of the tiles top left from you!"

"For each round of positioning, you can only move to a neighboring tile in any direction from your original position. Please move to your new positions!"

[Top left...] Lin Sanjiu looked around, then she moved to C3.

"Alright, both contestants have taken their positions. Black screen down!"

This time, both teams suddenly started discussing quietly just because they noticed that Lin Sanjiu and that contestant Ai were both standing on tile C3.

"During this round of positioning, both contestants are standing on the same tile... If that is the case, both contestants must duel to determine the victor. The loser has to leave the game while the

victor can remain in the game and join the next round of positioning."

"For example, let's say that contestant Lin lost this duel, could contestant Lin leave the game."

Lin Sanjiu walked away from the grid quietly.

"Only when contestant Ai is left standing on C3 will the tile reveal its points. Contestant Ai, if you look at the hint on the tile now, you'll see that it says: 'There is a -1 point penalty in one of the tiles directly in front of you.' That's right, this will be how you'll gain and lose points in this game. Everyone, please take note of the hints!"

"Through this process, the team who loses more than half their members first will lose the game. The winner of this game will get the prizes offered by the losing team and a reward of +1 point!"

Rules:

1. A duel will end when one party concedes defeat, dies, falls off the dueling platform or is incapacitated.

2. A contestant can choose not to move from their tile, but the contestant cannot choose to do so consecutively more than once.
[1]

3. Each time the screen descends, it will stay for 15 seconds.

4. Hints given to both teams are the same.

All members of each team are recommended to participate in this game.

"The rules regarding the prizes are a little different for this game, so please listen carefully. Firstly, a Special Item or ability will be chosen randomly from one of the six members, this will be offered as a common prize. In addition to that, the loser of a duel will have to give up one Active Skill to the winner as an individual prize."

Despite Mr. Dot's cheerful, light-hearted tone, the expressions

from both team immediately turned dour. In that case, whether it was from the team or individual perspective, there was no way anyone will concede defeat — in other words, every duel will be a fierce battle...

There were only 5 minutes left for the contestants to decide, and during this time, Lin Sanjiu took the initiative and offered [An inedible lunch] as Red Team's prize. She carried B.Rabbit with her and placed him down only when she walked into the white fog. When she came out, she placed the rabbit back on her shoulders and walked toward the other members.

"Miss Lin, thank you." Zhong Junkai smiled apologetically at her. "If one of our ability was offered as a prize by chance, it would be troublesome."

"You're welcome." Lin Sanjiu smiled. When Old Wang and Chen Fan saw her coming back, they continued whispering to each other. Lara approached her and looked at B.Rabbit with curiosity, "Miss Lin, it seems like you're very fond of this rabbit... What's its name? Does he know how to say his own name?"

The rabbit immediately narrowed his large innocent eyes into an evil stare. Before he blurted any words, Lin Sanjiu quickly held and covered the rabbit's face. "It doesn't have a name. It doesn't. It knows too little words. Haha!"

Just when the B.Rabbit bit the middle of her palm, Mr. Dot's announcement that the game had begun reverberated through every inch of the arena.

"Raise the screen! [Meeting at the Crossroads] has officially begun, please choose your positions!"

"How should we position ourselves?" Chen Fan asked with some frustration as he examined the large grid and wiped the water droplets on his face. He wasn't good at such games but had an affinity with activities, such as fighting, which did not require thinking.

"We don't get any hints for the first positioning, and we can't tell where the opponents will stand... I think we can just spread out and randomly choose a tile," Zhong Junkai replied. He was the first to chose and stand on a tile.

Everyone agreed even though no one else said anything. With one sweeping glance, everyone had taken their positions. They had spent less than a minute. "The red team has confirmed their positions!"

Mr. Dot announced shortly. However, the screen did not descend even after some time.

From the looks of things, White Team was not ready. The members of the Red Team crossed their arms and waited for several minutes, but still, nothing happened. As they gradually felt a little anxious and puzzled by the matter, Mr. Dot finally said, "The White Team has confirmed their positions! Black screen down!"

Everyone heaved a sigh of relief. They watched as the black screen — lacking any sense of realism — descending before their eyes. Members from both teams finally had the chance to see each other face-to-face.

Whether it was the woman who looked older than she was, the long-legged lady with an ultra mini skirt, the young man named Ai-something in a flowery shirt or the loser of the first game... this was the first time the members of the Red Team could scrutinize their opponents at such a close distance.

When Lin Sanjiu saw Hu Changzai and Hai Tianqing's familiar faces, she suppressed her emotions which suddenly surfaced and looked away expressionlessly.

Following which, she felt slightly alarmed. Both men were standing on the grid, they were standing closer than before the screen went up, but they seemed to be standing too close...

Before Lin Sanjiu could react, Mr. Dot announced happily, "For this turn, no one stepped in any tiles with penalty points! Now, I will report the positions of each contestant.

"White Team: Old Woman E1, Hai Tianqing C3, Loser E5, Long-legs A1, Hu Changzai A3, Flowery shirt A5.

"Red Team: Lin Sanjiu C5, Lara Lian C3, Zhong Junkai D4, Chen Fan E3, Old Wang C2, B.Rabbit B3.

"Unfortunately, two contestants have collided at C3! Can both contestants please walk away from the grid!"

Even though both teams couldn't hear each other, the atmosphere surrounding the White Team visibly changed when Mr. Dot finished his sentence. Old Woman lifted a corner of her lips subtly, Long-legs's lips parted to show a smile, and Flowery shirt even looked like he was whistling with his two fingers in his mouth. It was as though they had anticipated that there would be a duel in this first turn.

A flat slate platform which was at least 20m² flew out from the white fog to the empty space beside the grids. It remained suspended in mid-air. It was obviously where the duels will take place.

Once that green platform appeared, it was as if the Red Team had been struck by lightning.

Not expecting to fight against the contestant from the White Team which appeared to be the strongest, Lara turned pale. She trembled as she turned to look at her boyfriend. "Honey... What should I do? I... I can't..."

Zhong Junkai had a grim expression, he thought for a moment clenching his teeth, then asked, "Mr. Dot, can I fight on her behalf?"

"Of course not! Could the contestant from the Red Team please step onto the dueling platform."

Hai Tianqing ran a short distance. Using that momentum, he flipped up onto the platform. On the other hand, Lara walked unsteadily to the side of the platform. She clung on to the edge of the platform with both hands and struggled for a long time trying to climb up in vain. In the end, Zhong Junkai got approval from Mr. Dot to help her. He ran over and boosted her up onto the platform. In that manner, Lara was finally on the platform.

When the members of the White Team saw this, they quickly exchanged grinning faces. Meanwhile, the members of the Red Team were embarrassed at that display.

"Hey, Rabbit!" Lin Sanjiu called quietly to B.Rabbit who was at B3. Her voice was so soft that she almost couldn't hear herself.

B.Rabbit didn't turn to look at her, but his long ears twitched, showing her that he was listening.

"Even though there are 25 tiles, with twelve people on the grid, there's quite a high chance of collision. But what are the odds of a collision in the first round and right in the middle..." Fortunately, she was speaking to a rabbit, so she lowered her voice even more: "Why don't you move to C3 for the next turn, I reckon you'll have a chance to fight Hai Tianqing."

"What? You mean he won't move?" B.rabbit lost his composure, "If I fight with him, who should win and who should lose?"

Chapter 79: Meeting at the Crossroads (2)

"F*ck!"

"Good!"

The black screen had risen once again so the two teams could only see the platform floating in mid-air. Just two minutes after the duel began, two vastly different exclamations erupted from the teams — under the cheers from the White Team and the curses from the Red Team — the outcome of the duel in mid-air has been decided!

Lara fell off the slate platform with a pallid face. Propping herself, she coughed a few time violently but was unable to stand up even after some time.

"Isn't that a little too fast? No matter how weak Miss Lara is, it's impossible that she can't last for more than two minutes...." Chen Fan's eyes widened as he stared at Hai Tianqing who was totally uninjured, he was utterly shocked. Hai Tianqing walked back to the grid behind the screen, looking unperturbed.

On the contrary, Lin Sanjiu was very surprised that Lara could even last for more than a minute. Since she fought alongside Hai Tianqing in Oasis, she witnessed how powerful he was. During that 30 seconds, he managed to turn countless higher-tiered, winged duoluozhongs into mincemeat.

Lara may look dainty, but her combative skills might be better than expected...

When Zhong Junkai saw his girlfriend on the ground, he rushed forward to help her up, forgetting to get permission from Mr. Dot first.

As she held on to her boyfriend's arm, Lara leaned forward and whispered something to him. As they were too far, no one could tell what she said.

Next, Mr. Dot voice rang out again: "Red Team contestant, please enter the white fog and hand over your Active Skill."

As if those words had stolen her spine, Lara slid into Zhong Junkai's arms with her face covered in tears. Zhong Junkai wore a face of pity as he consoled her for quite some time. She finally became calmer and stumbled toward the white fog. As the others saw her disappearing into the fog, they slowly lost their sense of security.

"Oh?" Mr. Dot suddenly exclaimed in surprise, he continued as if he was having a conversation with someone, "Yes. That's right... No, as long as it's within this Pocket Dimension, even if it's a corpse... Yes, if the members of the team refuse to comply, they'll be punished."

Even though their view was blocked by the screen, it was apparent to everyone on the Red Team that Mr. Dot was definitely speaking to someone from the White Team.

However, they wondered what the conversation was about and why they were talking about corpses.

They could not hear the questions that the White Team was asking, but they understood from Mr. Dot's reply that things were going to turn ugly.

As uncertainty crept into the faces of the Red Team members, Lara slowly walked out of the fog with a pale complexion. "Thud." She plopped on the ground beside the grid and started sobbing.

Zhong Junkai walked back to D4 and stood there, heavy-hearted.

"What happened?" Chen Fan asked.

"Lara told me that she begged that huge man to show her mercy, but the man didn't care and punched her off the platform." Zhong Junkai stared at the screen with a scowl. "I will definitely get Lara's ability back!"

Chen Fan gave him a few sounds of affirmation while B.Rabbit

twitched his ears and hesitantly turned to look at Lin Sanjiu.

She gave him a decisive nod.

"Alright, everyone can look at the hints on the ground now!"

"Ding dong." Words appeared on the tiles. Old Wang received a "There's a +1 point in one of the tiles behind you." hint, while B.Rabbit had a "There's a -1 point penalty to your left." Whereas Lin Sanjiu, Chen Fan, and Zhong Junkai all got the hint: "There seem to be no points nearby."

"Now the second positionings will commence!"

Once Mr. Dot gave the order, the Red Team members looked around anxiously and started to move. B.Rabbit leaped to C3 where Lara was previously standing. He squinted his eyes and curled up into a ball.

The Red Team got into their positions very quickly — basically, they had no strategy. They only avoided the possible penalty tile and the tiles where the opponents previously were.

After they had waited another few minutes, Mr. Dot said, "The White Team have confirmed their positions! Black screen down!"

The black screen slowly descended once more. This time, a glow appeared from one of the tiles in the grid on the white semicircle.

"Congratulations White Team! You received the reward of +1 point!"

The members of the Red Team froze as they all looked at the opposite grid. On the corresponding row where Old Wang was standing on their own grid, there was a flashing red "Congratulations" on one of the tiles in that row. That red glow lit up the old wrinkle-covered face of the person standing in it so that her face looked like a patch of parched red earth.

When Old Wang noticed that, his expression quickly changed to that of immense caution as if a rabbit was threatened by a

predator. A smile gradually spread on the Old Woman's face.

"Now, I'll report the positions..."

White Team: Long-legs A2, Hu Changzai A3, Flowery shirt B5, Hai Tianqing C3, Old Woman D2, Loser E4.

Red Team: Lin Sanjiu C5, B.Rabbit C3, Old Wang C2, Chen Fan D4, Zhong Junkai D5.

Once again, the seemingly most powerful person from the White Team had collided with their member and this time it was that rabbit — the only member which looked weaker than Lara!

As they saw the black screen slowly consuming the view of the opposing team once more, everyone from the Red Team, with the exception of Lin Sanjiu and B.Rabbit, was speechless, as if their throats were strangled by silence.

Suddenly, a hoarse voice broke the silence. Chen Fan glared at Old Wang with a pair of bloodshot eyes, "Old Wang, you didn't move, right?"

That sentence immediately drew everyone's attention — Lin Sanjiu also chose to remain on her tile, but somehow Chen Fan only stared at Old Wang.

"Yes," Old Wang replied curtly without turning behind to look at Chen Fan.

"Isn't this a little too odd? I've nothing to say about Miss Lin remaining on her tile... But you clearly received a hint which stated that there was a +1 point reward behind you, yet you chose not to move..." The veins on Chen Fan's forehead began to pop. "Coincidentally, that old woman shifted to the spot where you could have moved to; thus you managed to avoid a duel... Did you discover something?"

Old Wang stood motionlessly without answering his question.

Instead, Lara, who was standing outside, shouted urgently, more

concerned than anybody in the game, "Say something! Why didn't you go for that +1? Even if we lose this game, as long as our score is higher, we'll win the challenge... why did you give up that +1 point reward?"

"Shut up!" Old Wang roared back fiercely, turning his head sharply at Lara. "If you could have avoided that duel, you f*cking would have! Do you think I don't know women like you!?"

He grunted twice before looking at both Chen Fan and Zhong Junkai who were looking at him in shock. "You both probably haven't even noticed! Think for yourselves, idiots! The White Team planned their positions during the first round!" he hollered.

Zhong Junkai was about to rush up to him furiously, but he suddenly paused and quickly looked at Lin Sanjiu. Her back was facing against him as she nodded at B.Rabbit. Shortly after, he left the grid and leaped up onto the platform in a single bounce.

As Chen Fan already predicted that B.Rabbit would definitely lose, he didn't even look once at the platform, finding it pointless. He just pressed on with his question: "What do you mean? Tell us clearly!"

"Harrumph... With 25 tiles, you don't even need 6 people. You just need 5 people to form an X shape. The additional person will stand in the middle of column A. In that way, no matter where we stand, there will be a White Team member just a step away. The middle of the grid, where there's the highest chance of collision, is occupied by the member with the strongest combative skills... You've never thought about it?"

As Chen Fan thought over it, his expression gradually grew dark.

"If you combine that with how their movements in the second term, can't you two see what they're planning? If I didn't remain in this tile, I would have collided with that old woman... Can you see that a White Team member is also moving toward Miss Lin? Even though there aren't any points near her, he is still moving in

her direction! The White Team is going after us!" Despite his fat, greasy appearance, Old Wang was unexpectedly quick-witted.

"That bespectacled guy stayed on his tile, so we probably don't have to worry about him. But the others must have some level of confidence since they dare to target us!" Old Wang went straight to the point with his conclusion.

When he heard this, getting revenge for his girlfriend was the least of Zhong Junkai's concern. He turned to Lin Sanjiu and asked with an unsteady voice, "Miss Lin... what are your thoughts? Do you think this is really the case?"

At the moment, Chen Fan also looked at her. This was most likely due to her performance in the first game.

Lin Sanjiu did not turn behind. "Perhaps... but I'm not good at chess," she answered them mildly. She could sense their disappointment and their anxiety enveloping her.

Silence fell over the people within the large grid, no one spoke for some time as if they were all desperately trying to remember when the members of the White Team were positioned and considered how they should make their next move.

This lasted for some time until Zhong Junkai was the first one to realize that there was something off, he looked upward, feeling somewhat astonished.

"Miss Lin, your rabbit is... very powerful!" He fixed his gaze on the dueling platform as he commented haltingly, "It... it has already been... five to six minutes?"

The rest of the members instantly looked toward the dueling platform and realized that they haven't heard the words: "The red team contestant has been defeated."

It almost seemed as if B.Rabbit, which was only about the size of a palm, ironically had a natural advantage over Hai Tianqing's overly large built. From Hai Tianqing huge shadow, they could see

that every time he aimed an overwhelmingly strong attack at the rabbit, the little yellow shadow would evade nimbly.

"It only knows how to dodge rapidly. But even if it continues evading those attacks, it can't win that duel." Lin Sanjiu crossed her arms as she sighed.

Almost as if prove her right, once Lin Sanjiu finished her sentence, that small yellow shadow was hit. It flew quite some distance away from the platform and landed on the ground, motionless.

"The Red Team contestant has been defeated! Red Team contestant, please enter the white fog and hand over your Active Skill."

Chapter 80: Meeting at the Crossroads (3)

Meeting at the Crossroads (3)

"If the opponent dies during the duel, would the victor lose his reward?"

This was the question that the White Team asked in the previous positioning, and the Red Team was only conscious of it now...

Now that they thought about it, they understood Mr. Dot's answer: even if the loser died, his or her team members had to carry their dead body into the white fog so that their Active Skill could be offered.

Therefore, this must be the same case for B.Rabbit who seemed to have fainted and was unable to move by himself. Lin Sanjiu walked toward him silently and carried that little ball of yellow fur. The rabbit immediately flopped limply in her hands and appeared totally unconscious.

The remaining members of the Red Team watched as Lin Sanjiu back slowly disappeared into the white fog. At the moment, they looked at each other with a lingering fear.

"What should we do next?" Chen Fan's forehead was covered with cold sweat as he turned to Zhong Junkai and continued, "Ignoring the others, we must avoid colliding with that huge man. He already stayed put in C3 the previous turn, so he will definitely move the next turn. But we simply can't tell where he'll move next..."

Zhong Junkai pursed his lips, not knowing what to do either. The current situation was definitely against them — as both teams got the same hints, they'll be caught by the White Team if they go for the points. However, if they don't snatch the points, the White Team will easily rack up all the points. If the gap between their scores gets too wide, their team will likewise be thrashed by the

White Team.

"If we really think about it, the scariest person in the White Team should just be that huge man, right?" Zhong Junkai said without much confidence, "If we have to fight with the other members, there's still a chance of winning..."

Chen Fan nodded hesitantly. "Um... the best option is still to gain points while we avoid a collision..." Actually, he knew that what he said didn't help one bit.

The black screen stood in front of them, blocking the view of their unpredictable opponents. As it had been some time since Mr. Dot had literally blown the fog away, columns of white fog snaked toward the arena once again. The members of the Red Team remained silent as they waited for quite some time before they spotted Lin Sanjiu walking back to them.

She placed B.Rabbit at the side of the grid and walked back to her tile. B.Rabbit laid on the ground and said nothing. He gave Lara a quick glance before he turned to look at the grid.

Next, just like before, they looked at the hints and confirmed their positions, then the black screen descended...

The only difference when the black screen came down was the contrast between the Red Team's uneasiness and the White Team's composure.

None of the tiles on both grids was glowing, which meant that no one got any points or lost any points.

"I'll announce the positions..."

White Team: Long-legs B2, Hu Changzai A2, Flowery shirt B4, Loser D4, Hai Tianqing D3, Old Woman C3.

Red Team: Old Wang C1, Lin Sanjiu B5, Zhong Junkai C4, Chen Fan C3.

Before Mr. Dot even said a word, Chen Fan jumped up and stared

at the Old Woman standing on the same column and tile. "I collided with her?" he uttered.

"Did you think that since the huge man had to move away from C3, it would naturally become the safest place?" Old Wang, who was standing at the first tile sneered.

Chen Fan wiped the moisture on his face. No one knew if that was cold sweat or rainwater, but he didn't reply and turned to look at the platform instead.

"I already told you that the White Team members are after us. They had already predicted that someone would do that... Once that huge guy leaves, someone will immediately take over that spot!"

Just then, Mr. Dot prompted both contestants to climb up to the platform.

"So what if I collided with that woman from the White Team? Look at her, she is just a weak, sickly woman." He finally calmed himself and laughed.

After that, he walked out of the grid, reached out for the edge of the slate platform with both hands and leaped up onto the platform with one push.

Old Wang made a soft scoffing sound before he eyed the old woman, who was slowly walking away from the screen, intensely.

That woman didn't look taller than 1.6m. She looked emaciated as if she had not eaten a filling meal for years. Her skin, hair, and expression were visibly dry and marked with the signs of age, she looked very different from the few of them who were only experiencing their first apocalypse. However, hidden beneath her ruined face, a flash of danger was lurking within her eyes.

The old woman walked slowly to the platform. She hung onto the platform and climbed up in a straightforward manner, not appearing nimble nor clumsy.

When it was time to fight, Chen Fan turned a little pale. "Madam, you look tired and weak." He looked at her doubtfully before smiling. "To be honest, I'm young and energetic. I'm a little embarrassed to take advantage of that. Why don't you just surrender?"

The old woman gave him a stoic face. Without even batting an eye, she got into a fighting position.

"I guess you can't hear me." Chen Fan remembered that they couldn't even hear the other in the arena. As if to encourage himself, he spoke a little louder this time: "I'll just have to fight! A person must harden his heart to survive."

As he said that, he hid his left hand behind his back, trying to make that action look casual. Unfortunately, it drew the attention of the opponent even more.

"There's no need to hurry," Chen Fan murmured to himself as stared hard at his opponent and took two steps back, "I haven't fully summoned my pen."

The old woman frowned, crooking her head slightly as if she couldn't quite understand what was happening. Chen Fan didn't seem too worried about the old woman possible attacks so he lowered his head and mumbled as if that would speed up his ability, "Quick, quick! Create some kind of coincidences..."

The last few words of his sentence were blasted into powder as he was hit by an explosive attack. Blood and countless bits of destroyed innards spurted out from Chen Fan's mouth like a fountain. The old woman had somehow shifted beside him and tilted her head, avoiding the spray of blood that flew past her ear and frowning as if disgusted by the filth. Despite that, a few drops of blood still landed on her wrinkled face.

She quickly bent down and stepped onto Chen Fan's body which was moving backward following the momentum of the attack. She managed to stop his body before it fell off the edge of the platform,

a smile slowly crept up her face.

"Lad, we can't hear each other because of the boundary line below. I've actually heard every single word you've said on the platform."

Chen Fan only realized that he couldn't dodge that attack when pain tore through all his internal organs. Anger filled his eyes as a mixture of blood and tears seeped out uncontrollably. Only at that moment did he recall that Lara had clearly begged for mercy, whereas he never even thought much about it.

He gurgled as blood filled his throat once again. He was unable to say a word. He looked at his left hand with much effort and saw his bloodied hand — the form of his fountain pen had almost reached the nip.

"What did you just say? Once that pen appears, it'll create coincidences?" the old woman asked softly as her skin crinkled with a smile.

"No coincidence can save you now." She stepped on him, exerting force. Just as the form of the fountain pen was finally completed, Chen Fan let out the last loud groan in his lifetime, then his body went limp, and he stopped moving.

The pen disappeared — all the members of the Red Team were dumbfounded.

"Oh, the Red Team contestant has died in the duel. Please send someone from your team up so that his Active Skill can be offered," Mr. Dot showed no special emotion, he used a tone as if he was ordering dinner.

The old woman stepped one step backward. Suddenly, she kicked Chen Fan's waist, and the corpse rolled off the platform. It fell heavily to the ground with a thud creating a splash of mud and blood.

As Lin Sanjiu was standing closest to the platform, the gory

mixture splattered across her face. She closed her eyes and wiped her face. She looked at the other two men who were in shock. She walked away from the grid without saying a word, then she lifted Chen Fan's legs and dragged his dead body into the white fog. Chen Fan had died in a horrible manner — his entire chest cavity was covered by multiple bloodied holes.

"Even though I only knew you for a short time, I didn't even speak much to you, and we were not even on good terms..." Lin Sanjiu lowered her head as she pulled his body along, mumbling to herself, "but you're really too pitiful. Dying like this..."

After she said this, she reached the same place in the white fog where the same wooden chest stood, waiting for the next sacrificial offering.

Lin Sanjiu opened the chest with a creak. "We can be considered acquaintances so don't worry..." she was composed when she took the dead man's hand and placed it in the wooden chest. She saw a faint light being sucked out of Chen Fan's palm as it gently floated to the bottom of the chest. "I will avenge you."

Chen Fan's Active Skill had been offered. Lin Sanjiu pulled his hand out from the chest and closed it. However, she did not leave. Instead, she touched the bottom of the chest as if to ascertain something and nodded.

Lin Sanjiu dragged the corpse out from the white fog and threw Chen Fan's body to the side of the grid. When Lara caught a glimpse of it, her face turned white instantaneously. She covered her mouth and crawled some distance away from it quickly.

When she returned to her own tile, the hints popped up once again with a "Ding dong", and words appeared on the ground once again.

Lin Sanjiu looked down. Just as before, the hint stated: "There is a +1 point reward in front of you."

Chapter 81: Meeting at the Crossroads (4)

White Team: Flowery shirt A5, Hu Changzai A1, Long-legs C1, Old woman C3, Hai Tianqing D3, Loser D4.

Red Team: Lin Sanjiu A5, Old Wang E2, Zhong Junkai D5.

"How unfortunate! Contestants from both White Team and Red Team have chosen the A5 tile... We will just have to see who wins the duel to get the +1 point reward on the tile!" Mr. Dot said as he clicked his tongue. "If the Red Team loses this round again, this game will end. How exciting!"

After hearing that, the two other members of the Red Team turned pale. Chen Fan's corpse laid outside the grid, his pair of harrowing red eyes were wide open. His shocked and aggrieved expression was, in fact, more terrifying than the messy wound on his chest.

[He was still alive a few minutes ago...] Facing the threat of death, Zhong Junkai felt continuous waves of weakness, and for a moment, his mind felt numb.

Just as what Lin Sanjiu had anticipated, Flowery shirt stepped onto the same tile as her. The A5 tiles on both grids were very close to each other, so much so that if Lin Sanjiu looked straight, she would come face to face with Flowery shirt who was staring directly at her.

The man seemed to be in his mid-twenties. It was as if he had gotten his fashion sense from gangsters in some cliché Chinese drama, and the Hawaiian shirt he was wearing was annoyingly eye-catching. He only looked away from Lin Sanjiu when the black screen rose again, but he seemed to look forward to their duel.

"Miss Lin, please don't lose!"

Lin Sanjiu heard Zhong Junkai's anxious voice calling from behind her just as she was about to take her first step toward the

platform.

She looked behind and saw Zhong Junkai's face. It was covered with water droplets, though she couldn't tell if it was sweat or rain. "If you lose, we're goners!"

If she were to lose this round, the White Team would receive +3 points and three Active abilities. Needless to say, Chen Fan's death would also be in vain.

"Alright, I'll try my best." Lin Sanjiu nodded. Following Hai Tianqing, she created some distance between herself and the platform. Then, she ran forward and leaped up with the momentum, landing onto the slate platform.

Lin Sanjiu looked down from the floating platform. She realized that she could also see a section of the White Team's semicircle clearly. She could see the members of the White Team huddling together, discussing, and wondered if they were talking about their positions for the next turn. She looked over to where Mr. Dot was standing, but she saw nothing other than that hazy white fog.

"So, you still have the mood to look around, huh?"

She heard an unfamiliar voice. Flowery shirt spoke quickly, chaining the syllabus in his words. Lin Sanjiu seemed unoffended as she turned to look at the man who had just jumped up onto the platform.

Looking back at her, the man chuckled, "Nevermind. You're too pitiable because you will soon have to offer one of your ability to me..."

Lin Sanjiu eyed him coldly, feeling her fury coursing through her body like lava. She let out a fleeting laughter. "I'll give you a few seconds to surrender."

Flowery shirt was stunned for a second as if he could not comprehend what she had just said.

Lin Sanjiu ignored him and looked down at the White Team once

again.

When she carried B.Rabbit into the white fog just now, he immediately abandoned his act and told her all the information he had received from Hai Tianqing. Within the White Team, the person they had to look out for was that Old Woman. That woman was supposedly from another New World; she was cruel and very skilled. On the other hand, the man in front of her was just a paper tiger.

Aside from Hu Changzai who had not developed any physical enhancements, Flowery shirt was the weakest — apart from his acrid tongue.

Few seconds slipped by, but Flowery shirt did not surrender; instead, it was obvious that he had decided on the wrong choice. Lin Sanjiu felt a movement in front of her, and saw a fist heading in her direction. However, with her Overall Physical Enhancement, that punch looked incredibly slow. It was shocking that her opponent actually chose to engage in a physical brawl!

She stepped to one side and kicked the back of Flowery shirt's knee when she found an opening.

"Bam!" He kneeled onto the green slate platform.

"Swoosh!" Not giving him a chance to get up, she delivered a fast and violent kick to his femur. This was followed by a bone-chilling "Crack". Flowery shirt let out a loud scream, and tears and mucus instantly ran down his face. He used both his hands, trying to support himself with various positions. However, he was still unable to get up after a long time.

In a blink of an eye, Lin Sanjiu had managed to force a man, a head taller than her, to the ground, and she didn't even need to take out her hands from her pockets.

"Even though your leg is broken, you aren't paralyzed." She crouched down to look at his injury and even consoled him. "Count

yourself lucky. There isn't any bad blood between us, so I've already held back and didn't break your spine... Don't cry! Listen to me!"

Flowery shirt sniffled stopped, he looked at her.

"Go back and tell that old hag on your team that I will move to B4 next. Tell her to wait for me there." Lin Sanjiu stared at Flowery shirt and gave him a sinister smile. "If I find that she is not on B4 during the next positioning, I will chase after you for the next two games and make sure that I kill you. Got it?"

Flowery shirt nodded hurriedly.

"If you understand, then you better surrender now." Lin Sanjiu placed one of her feet threateningly on his back.

"I surrender!" Flowery shirt shouted without delay. As if afraid that it was not clear enough, he repeated it a few times: "I surrender! I surrender!"

Lin Sanjiu sneered at him then she left him alone and jumped down from the platform. She walked past the relieved gaze of the other members and returned to her tile. With that, the Red Team successfully gained that +1 point. Now, the score was 5:4. Even though the Red Team seemed to be leading with 1 point, they only had exactly three members left on the grid. If one more person was kicked out from the game, they would lose.

"Ding dong." The hints appeared on the tiles where the three Red Team members were standing, drawing all their attention.

Old Wang received a "There is a +1 point reward in front of you.", Zhong Junkai received a "There is a -1 point penalty in front of you." whereas Lin Sanjiu received a "There is no points nearby" hint. Once the hints disappeared, the fifth positioning quickly ended with Mr. Dot's announcement.

The black screen lowered once again at a slow crawling speed, revealing all their position again.

This time, a tile on the White Team's grid glowed red once more. The long-legged woman with a red mini short skirt, crossed her arms as she stood above the glowing tile. Both satisfaction and disappointment showed on her face. She looked very discontented when she saw the Red Team member she missed.

When Lin Sanjiu saw her, Lin Sanjiu exchanged looks with B.Rabbit. They thought the same thing: what Hai Tianqing had said, "The strategy to target the Red Team was basically planned by that woman in a mini-skirt. She doesn't look like that sort of person, but she is actually very dangerous."

It was really quite hard for them to believe what he said because no matter how they looked at her, she seemed like an impulsive person.

"Oh... A contestant from the White Team stepped on a tile with +1 point reward. That +1 point for the White Team," Mr. Dot suddenly sounded rather lazy.

Their scores were quickly even once again. It was now 5:5.

"Now, I will announce the positions."

White Team: Hu Changzai B2, Hai Tianqing C3, Long-legs D2, Old Woman B4, Loser D5.

Red Team: Old Wang E1, Zhong Junkai E4, Lin Sanjiu B4.

"Both teams have collided once more." Observing the current situation, Lin Sanjiu's threat was very effective. Flowery shirt, limping on one leg, appeared to have delivered her message. She looked up and smiled faintly at Old Woman who was in the same column.

Her opponent returned her smile with a dark smile plastered on that ashen dry face.

When the screen rose again, Lin Sanjiu threw a glance at Old Wang and Zhong Junkai.

Even though she had defeated Flowery shirt, it did nothing to boost her team members confidence. Judging from the tile that Old Wang chose, he would rather give up on a nearby point than risk a collision with anyone from the White Team. Shakened by Chen Fan's death, Zhong Junkai also chose to avoid the White Team.

Sighing, Lin Sanjiu stepped out of the grid. In the end, conceding that she could only count on herself. A short distance from them, a person was already standing on the dueling platform. The old woman looked down at Lin Sanjiu condescendingly from above. With a quick flip, Lin Sanjiu got up the platform.

Chapter 82: Lin Sanjiu's Kills and Steals

While she was dragging Chen Fan's corpse, Lin Sanjiu carefully examined his lethal wounds.

The old woman only used a single blow to kill Chen Fan; however, Chen Fan's chest was covered by multiple bloodied holes which were nested closely together. It was like a mashed up beehive and was quite a disturbing sight. No matter how much force that woman's punch held, there was no way that it could naturally produce such a wound. At that point, Lin Sanjiu concluded that it had something to do with that woman's fists.

Right now, Lin Sanjiu was witnessing that woman's strange attack. Instead of a single concentrated blow, the old woman's punch was like a combined attack of a dozen sharp spikes at once. Currently, they were all aimed at Lin Sanjiu upper body. If they hit her, she would instantly become a human sieve, and her corpse would look worse than Chen Fan's. Alarmed, Lin Sanjiu shifted her body, and as if every inch of her muscles suddenly came alive, she barely evaded the attack with a series of odd twists.

The attack cut off a lock of Lin Sanjiu's black hair, scattering it in mid-air. The length of the hair on Lin Sanjiu left side was now only at her collar bone.

"Oh? You're quite good." The old woman laughed in a hoarse voice. "The apocalyptic scenario in this world had just started for a few months, yet you have such physical aptitude... are you also from another world?"

"No," Lin Sanjiu replied as she stared at the woman.

The current circumstances were not very favorable for Lin Sanjiu. Even though she already knew that it wouldn't be easy, it was different experiencing firsthand how horrifyingly lethal that

old woman's attack was — and it seemed as if that was just to test her. She could tell that the prematurely-aged woman definitely had more hidden up her sleeves.

On the other hand, she had just woken up from a one-week coma, and her School of Higher Consciousness was still sealed. In addition to that, she didn't even have a decent weapon within the cards she had...

"No? Haha! Then your Potential Growth Value shouldn't be too low!" The old woman suddenly laughed out, tearing her fragile old dried skin. "Your Active Skill must be pretty good, why don't you just give it to me."

Just as she said that, she lunged toward Lin Sanjiu. Lin Sanjiu couldn't even see the rain of punches clearly, she was drowned by the multiple waves of spine-like attacks. If Chen Fan saw that sight, he would have been thankful that he did not die as a foam of blood.

With a burst of adrenaline, Lin Sanjiu moved at a speed she had never even imagined, her movements were so fast that they almost congealed into a single streak. Yet even at that speed, she only managed to dodge the main field of the attack, while both of arms were already covered with multiple streaks of blood. While she dodged, she nervously considered her options. Her laughter item could not be used on females, Cat Litter was not a combat item, if she used "Route 300" to seal her opponent's special item, the old woman could still continue using her Active Skills...

By elimination, she was only left with her Pygmalion Choker. However, the greatest flaw of the item was that she needed another person to describe a skill to her; otherwise, that Special Item was basically useless.

[What should I do?]

"Why are you only dodging?"

Every subsequent whirlwind of attacks was more vicious than the previous, but the old woman was unable to cause any major injuries due to Lin Sanjiu's eel-like dodging. The old woman finally started losing patience and held back her attacks saying, "Let's put a quick end to this."

Lin Sanjiu stroke the back of her neck mindlessly, and a thought suddenly crossed her mind: [Isn't there a person right in front of me?!]

She knew that she wasn't great at acting, so she just steadied herself and lowered her eyes, asking, "Do you know why I specifically asked you to come up to the platform with me?"

A glint suddenly flashed in her opponent's weary eyes.

"That's because Chen Fan is my younger brother. We grew up together and even developed the same abilities. Since you killed him, I must avenge him."

As expected, that old woman was slightly taken aback. She took a glance at her own hand and said, "What? That pen? Some sort of coincidence?"

Lin Sanjiu's Pygmalion Choker grew faintly warm for a second but immediately cooled down again.

[Why can't she make herself clear!]

Lin Sanjiu suppressed her anxiety and thought for a moment before she intentionally asked, "You know about it? If you've already witnessed my brother's power, how could he possibly lose to you?"

"Haha!" the old woman suddenly let out a high-pitched laughter. "How? How was he suppose to win with that rubbish ability to create coincidences? I guess you'll die by my hands too!"

Once that woman finished her sentence, Lin Sanjiu leaped up high, barely evading the sudden flurry of fists.

Lin Sanjiu snatched a breath as she threw a glance at her own hand. Unlike the original skill, her Pygmalion Choker could activate a skill at an extremely fast speed; so before she even landed on the ground, she was holding a fountain pen in her hand.

[No coincidence. No story]

Description: A painful fact that people can't accept is that life is a series of coincidences. Humans are wired to seek for order and patterns amidst chaos and are unable to accept that they just drift through life. This is precisely the reason why suspense novels and conspiracy theories are so popular. Despite the chaos in life, this ability creates advantageous coincidences for the user just like the main character in novels, creating the illusion that all things are bounded by a natural order.

Remarks: The impact and frequency of the coincidences are determined by how common the user's name is. A unique name would imperceptibly reduce the probability of other coincidences occurring.

The old woman was stunned when she saw this. Even though she didn't understand what had happened, she felt like she was tricked. The old woman gave Lin Sanjiu an evil glare and lunge at her once again. This time, she did not use her fist, her two palms landed perfectly on Lin Sanjiu's...

... broad, thick back?

[How is this possible? We were facing each other just now...] Just as this thought surfaced, the old woman's ability was already activated, and the body in front of her instantly broke apart into multiple cubes...

[Carving up an Ox]

Anything that the user touches with her palms will be broken down into multiple cubes, including living humans. However, there are limitations when this ability is used on live humans: only

the area in contact with the user's palm will be affected, and the damage will be determined by the difference between Potential Growth Value of the user and the target. If the target's Potential Growth Value is much higher than the user, the attack might only affect the target's skin; whereas if the target's Potential Growth Value is much lower, the attack could sever a limb or even disintegrate the target's heart.

Fragments of flesh, hands, and legs fell from the sky like a rain of meat, putrid rotting fluid covered the old woman in an instant. Knowing that such a scenario would not happen if she touched a living person, the old woman was already aware that her attack had missed its target...

[What's with these body parts? Is it that young woman's habit to bring dead bodies around with her everywhere?]

Before the old woman could react, she noticed a long whip-like metallic sheen approaching her, through the rain of body parts. Shocked, she dodged and accidentally stepped on a finger soaked in rotting fluid — she suddenly lost balance and slipped.

Previously, she would have easily steadied herself in a split second; however, this time there was a long metallic whip-like thing waiting for her to lower her guard. In that short interval, the long whip-like shadow struck and pierced through her lower abdomen

At the same time, all the body parts, bits of flesh, mutilated hands and legs, and innards finally fell to the ground. The end of that gruesome rain revealed Lin Sanjiu standing with a duoluozhong's mouthpart in her hand. When she saw the old woman on the ground with a drooped head, Lin Sanjiu wiped away the blood and flesh on her own face and commented rather unimpressed, "So, this is [No coincidence. No story]."

The old woman couldn't help coughing up a mouthful of blood, there was still disbelief on her face when she saw the mouthpart in

her abdomen.

That was a mouthpart from one of the duoluozhongs from Oasis.

Moments before, Lin Sanjiu pulled out a duoluozhong's corpse from her deck of cards to defend herself. However, she did not expect that when her opponent used that [Carving up an Ox] ability, the duoluozhong's mouthpart would be so perfectly amputated, that it naturally became an excellent weapon.

Lin Sanjiu silently stepped forward and suddenly pulled out the mouthpart from the old woman's body. While blood spewed out from that woman's abdomen. Lin Sanjiu held the mouthpart tightly and swiftly stabbed both of the woman's thighs. As that woman screamed in agony, Lin Sanjiu couldn't help frowning and quickly shattered the woman's upper humerus (shoulders).

Even though she felt that her opponent deserved that torture, Lin Sanjiu couldn't help sighing, "You shouldn't be able to retaliate in that state..."

There was no expression on the old woman's face as she retorted, "So, what?"

The old woman said that with confidence as the duel should end right about now according to the rules as she had already been incapacitated. Just as that was said, Mr. Dot's voice quickly rang out: "Congratulations! The contestant from the Red Team won!"

Normally, both of them should leave the platform at that point. All seven people on the ground, looked up to the platform, waiting. However, Lin Sanjiu crouched down beside her opponent as though she didn't hear the announcement.

"Um, since you killed Chen Fan but I spared your life, I need to get something additional from you," Lin Sanjiu immediately held the woman's left arm as she said that, then she began jerking it, further exacerbating the woman's fractures. The old woman let out a painful growl, but Lin Sanjiu only laughed lightly, without

changing her expression. "It will just take a few minutes."

That woman's eyes suddenly widened as the red capillaries in her eyes flared because Lin Sanjiu was reaching for the ordinary-looking pouch on her waist. This was instantly followed by noisy protests from the White Team, but Mr. Dot did not step in to stop this as none of the rules were broken.

"Right, since you're from another world, you should have quite a lot of items." Lin Sanjiu looked at the three cards in her hand, before throwing a glance at the old woman who was lying in a pool of blood. That woman may have looked old previously, but right now, she seemed almost near her deathbed. Her stomach and intestines were mashed up, and that wound was just a mess of blood and flesh. From the looks of it, she probably wouldn't survive. Lin Sanjiu turned away in a near cold-blooded fashion and gestured for the White Team to collect their member.

When she landed back on the ground with a thud, the blood which slid off her body created a splatter on the floor. Lin Sanjiu carried the long mouthpart back with her to her own tile and watched as the White Team carried the old woman back to their side.

Reduced to that state, the old woman would have to count herself lucky if she didn't die, so she definitely wouldn't be able to join the next two games. After everyone read the hints, the sixth round ended with a heavy atmosphere.

In the same round, Old Wang who had been trying to avoid the White Team finally collided with Long-legs. But Lin Sanjiu's action brought about an outcome that no one had anticipated: Old Wang did not move from his tile and just shouted, "I surrender!"

Thus, the second game ended with the Red Team losing and Lara's abrupt rants. The current score was 5:6, the Red Team was behind by 1 point, and the next game was going to begin.

Chapter 83: Mouse Maze: From Companion to Food

Compared to the previous game with the grids, the arena was surrounded by a creepy darkness at that moment.

The temperature didn't change, it was still very hot. However, due to their prolonged hunger, all of their cold hands and feet trembled slightly as if soaked in ice water.

"Can anyone start a fire?" Lara's eyes shone dimly in the darkness. Gulp. She swallowed a mouthful of her own saliva and added, "If we have some salt, it'll be better."

Hearing that, Old Wang lifted one of his hands pressing on B.Rabbit and searched his side and back pockets. "Water entered my lighter, so I threw it away," he suddenly remembered this with regret.

"I can't be bothered anymore. Let's skin it first. If we run out of options, I'll even eat it raw!" Lara couldn't resist her hunger any longer, she pulled a motionless B.Rabbit over and thrust it over to her boyfriend. "You have a knife, right? Quick, skin it!"

Zhong Junkai was hesitant: "This is Miss Lin's rabbit..." he stammered, "I don't think we should eat i—" Before he could finish his sentence, his stomach suddenly rumbled loudly.

He did not dare to look at the rabbit on the ground for fear that he could not curb his insane hunger. He could feel the waves of hunger pangs clawing at his stomach — this was the first time in his life that he had felt such intense hunger.

"If we don't eat it, we will all die." Lara frowned as she eyed him. "Can you bear seeing me die of hunger? I mean, this isn't even your rabbit!"

Zhong Junkai gritted his teeth and said nothing.

"Quick! Pass me the knife!" Lara pushed him roughly. Seeing that her boyfriend was still unwilling to take action, she couldn't help yelling at him: "You're afraid of that woman! You're useless!"

Zhong Junkai stared at her in shock — this was the first time he heard his usually gentle and demure girlfriend using such a tone. Meanwhile, Lara was already reaching out for his fanny pack with her trembling arms. She wasn't trembling because of her lack of conviction to eat that rabbit but due to her dangerously low blood sugar which was causing her to feel faint.

All this time, Old Wang's pair of hungry eyes never left B.Rabbit. Compared to Lara, his condition was not any better. His cheeks were deep-sunken, and his pot-belly was visibly smaller.

Lara quickly found a switchblade, and a weak smile suddenly appeared. She placed the rabbit in a supine position, then she held the blade to its throat; the knife slowly sunk into the rabbit's brown fur...

Her fingers trembled as she pressed the blade down. Just then, a metallic whip-like sheen suddenly came at them. Lara didn't dodge in time, so she took a direct hit. She staggered as she lost her grip on the switchblade. The switchblade was flung a long distance away from them. Then, blood slowly seeped out from a gash on her face.

"My face!" Lara howled like a she-wolf as she lifted her head and held the wound on her face.

Within that time, Old Wang quickly picked up the rabbit and stuffed it in his pocket as if he already anticipated that someone would chase up to them. Just as he was about to turn and run, he fell forward unexpectedly on his hands and knees on the ground. He looked behind and realized that Lara was grabbing the leg of his trousers.

"Where are you taking my food?" she asked with a sinister expression.

At that point, Lin Sanjiu walked out from a narrow path just around the corner, she was still holding the duoluozhong's mouthpart. Even though she managed to disarm Lara with a single blow, her condition was actually the worst among them. She thought that she had already used quite a lot of strength in that previous attack, but it merely scraped Lara's face. Lin Sanjiu breathed heavily as she tried to stop her legs from wobbling and to control the burning hunger in her stomach.

[I'm hungry. So hungry. I don't care what it is, I just have to eat something...]

Lin Sanjiu leaned against a wall as she threatened with a hoarse voice, "Put that rabbit down. Otherwise, don't blame me if I start killing..."

This situation could only be explained by what had happened ten minutes — no, ten days before.

After the second game had ended, the grid and the screen melted away like ice-cream. The arena returned to the normal half-red, half-white circle. The only difference was that there was a dead body on one side and an almost dead, paralyzed person on the other side.

The members of both teams wore terrible expressions as they waited silently for Mr. Dot to introduce the next game. However, this time, Mr. Dot said nothing even after a long time. As everyone started becoming restless due to the confusion, slits on the ground opened up, and multiple walls ascended from the ground.

Like tree saplings growing up, everyone watched in shock as the walls grew taller and taller until they could not see their edges. The thick, black walls blocked off almost half of the natural lighting from the sky, creating a seemingly endless number of narrow paths.

The walls blocked the contestants' view of each other, so Lin Sanjiu only realized that there was no one near her when she heard

Mr. Dot's voice. The walls seemed to have segregated her from her team members.

"Oh, this is the third game, Mouse Maze." Mr. Dot laughed out. "This is a rather large maze, the Red Team will be at the entrance on this side, and the White Team will be at the other entrance. The goal of this game is very simple. You will just have to reach a specific small area in this maze to win this game and get the +1 point reward."

"Third game: Mouse Maze

"Rules: None

"Instructions: The members of the Red and White Team will start from their own respective entrances. Once a member reaches a specific area, the team will get a +1 point reward regardless of who reaches first.

"There will be a dinner table covered with white cloth in that specific area. However, there will only be sufficient food for four people, and only those who reach first can start eating. However, if the people who reach first leave any food behind, the others can still eat." Mr. Dot laughed at his own words, "But I highly doubt that anyone can resist such delicious food."

[You've gotta be kidding. Who would dare to eat the food you provide in such a place?]

Lin Sanjiu criticized inwardly. Suddenly, she heard her stomach growling.

[Huh?] Lin Sanjiu thought to herself.

"Ah, there is something that I still haven't told all of you," from Mr. Dot's tone, Lin Sanjiu could immediately tell that it was something bad.

"Within this parallel world, there is a barrier between the time here and the outside world. In other words, time flows differently from the world outside. I think you should have heard of that

saying that 'One day in Heaven is equivalent to one year on Earth' or the [tale of Urashima Taro going to Dragon Palace](#).

"One minute in this Challenge is equivalent to one day outside. Ever since all of you entered this challenge, it has been 43 minutes. That is... umm... 43 days outside.

"For this third game, I will remove the time barrier between this space and the outside world. You will still experience the same flow of time within the game, but you will find that your body will change accordingly to the world outside..."

Mr. Dot seemed to be still explaining, but Lin Sanjiu could no longer hear him clearly because she suddenly felt faint. Her limbs grew weak, she leaned on the wall and slid to the ground uncontrollably. She only regained her consciousness when her face touched a warm puddle on the ground.

It was only then that Mr. Dot's voice made sense to her ears again: "It must feel horrible to suddenly experience hunger accumulated over 43 days! I hope that all of you will put in your best efforts! After all, every minute here will be one day for your body. That's one day without food. But since all of you have enhanced body, you shouldn't die from one to two months of hunger. But you can't just continue without food... I hope all of you can survive till you reach the specific area in the maze. There is already a delicious spread for four prepared! "

[That means, only the four people who find the dinner table will survive?]

"There is another thing that everyone should take note of. There are no rules against killing in this game, so please work with your team members and stay on guard against your opponents." After Mr. Dot said that, he immediately announced, "Alright, now the game officially commences!"

After hearing Mr. Dot's crappy announcement, Lin Sanjiu didn't waste another precious second on the floor, she quickly forced

herself to stand up. Before she had even entered this pocket dimension, she had already been unconscious for one week. During that time, Hu Changzai could only feed her liquid food made of biscuit crumbs and water. Thus, even with her Overall Body Enhancement, Lin Sanjiu wasn't stronger than anyone there.

As she scanned the area, she only saw various paths stretching out, but they all looked the same. The black walls on both sides of the paths were so tall that they seemed to reach the clouds. The paths twisted and turned, seeming to extend aimlessly to nowhere.

Lin Sanjiu turned behind hoping to somehow meet up with her team members again, but she spotted no one navigating through the paths behind her. She felt her energy draining with every passing minute.

She sighed and gave up on reuniting with B.Rabbit. She decided to choose a direction and continued forward.

[This is too frustrating!] The first two paths that Lin Sanjiu chose led her to a dead end after a few minutes. After that, she kept reaching walls after walls of dead ends in the same direction. Navigating through such mazes actually required some amount of stamina and energy, but this was made worse by the days of hunger... Lin Sanjiu could only continue forward in a daze as she fantasized uncontrollably about the food which awaited her on the dinner table.

At that point, she suddenly heard a vague high-pitched scream. She was very familiar with that voice. That scathing, uncouth tone could only belong to B.Rabbit. "F*ck! Why are you attacking me!"

Due to the walls, Lin Sanjiu couldn't hear the conversation properly. She could only make out someone saying the word: eat.

Suddenly alerted, she immediately rushed toward the direction of the voice. "I WILL KILL ANYONE WHO DARES TOUCH HIM!" she shouted as loudly as she could, she didn't even know how she had managed to muster that energy.

There was an instant silence.

When the old woman lost the duel in the previous game, she offered Chen Fan's ability, [No coincidence. No story.]. When Lin Sanjiu received that ability from the chest, she found out that she could only create minute coincidences due to the uniqueness of her name.

But right now, even a tiny coincidence was useful in this situation. Lin Sanjiu held a fountain pen in her left hand as she chose a small path randomly; unexpectedly, that narrow path led her to the Red Team members.

As she saw Old Wang and the others running away from her, she stopped thinking and just chased after them.

You can look for the story on wiki. It is basically about a young man who visited the Dragon Palace and realized that 300 years have passed when he went back home, etc. etc.

An additional note on 'No Coincidence. No Story': Lin Sanjiu has a very uncommon name. Thus, she can't really use the ability 'No Coincidence. No Story' to its maximum potential. If the person had a super common name, then they would be able to create ridiculous coincidences which work to their advantage. I think the power works somewhat like in the manga Luck Stealer.

Chapter 84: Mouse Maze : The dead lead the way

"Huff... Huff..."

The sound of panting reverberated through narrow paths within the maze. The person who was panting seemed to be totally out of energy. Surrounded by silence, that heavy breathing could be heard clearly. Lara was the first to give up running, her steps slowed down as if she would just collapse anytime. Unable to catch her breath, she asked, "Is that... that woman still chasing after us?"

Before the two men behind her could reply, a long shadow reached out from a corner, answering her question.

That mouthpart was aimed at Old Wang. He immediately pulled his head backward as the mouthpart with serrated edges drew a long scratch on the wall, and pieces of concrete fell.

"D*mn it! All of you, stop running!" Old Wang shouted furiously as he grabbed Lara's arm. He finally made up his mind when he recovered from that ambushed attack. "I don't believe we can't defeat her if we work together! Didn't we get the rabbit unconscious?"

Lara hesitated for two seconds before casting a glance behind.

"That's only because that rabbit has lost one of its abilities, so it couldn't really fight," Zhong Junkai retorted nervously. "Let's just return that rabbit to her and search for that place, okay?" he urged his girlfriend.

Lara furrowed her brows instantly as she turned to him with an irritated face. "Search? Do you know where it is? Can you bring me there now? Among us, you're the only one who retained all your abilities. You're not helping, and you're even saying something like that!?"

"Xiao Zhong, don't worry. Right now, she is just as weak as us."

Old Wang flashed a grin at Zhong Junkai, who was glaring at Lara silently. "Besides, you still have Lara and I backing you up."

As he saw Lin Sanjiu walking toward them, Zhong Junkai felt a push from behind. When he turned behind, he could not tell who had pushed him, all he saw was his girlfriend's bloodshot eyes. He clenched his teeth and bent forward, preparing to sprint. Then, he rushed toward Lin Sanjiu, who had heard their conversation and thus was already prepared.

Zhong Junkai rushed toward her at an alarming speed. She did not dare to take that attack head-on, so she swerved to one side. However, as if he had eyes in the back of his head, Zhong Junkai turned sharply in an unexpected manner and approached her once again with an overwhelmingly vicious aura.

[Hit-and-run]

This is an ability tailored for rich kids. With this ability, the user can reach the speed of an F1 car, and his body mass will reach a few tonnes. Anyone who is rammed by this attack will either die or be badly injured. However, the user(culprit) of this hit-and-run will be unscathed.

As the paths in the maze were very narrow, Lin Sanjiu realized that she had nowhere to dodge after shifting to one side, and as she saw Zhong Junkai heading toward her like a wild bull, that pressure motivated her to think quickly. She thrust the mouthpart in her hand directly into the area of the wall above her. The sharp tip of the mouthpart immediately dug deep into the wall. Shortly after, Lin Sanjiu jumped and held the mouthpart, swinging her body upward into mid air.

"Boom!" A thunderous sound rang out as Zhong Junkai crashed into a wall. The impact was so great that the tall, black wall even shook for a few seconds. He held his own shoulders and was momentarily stunned for a second as he didn't expect that Lin Sanjiu would disappear from his sight at that critical moment.

Within that one second, Lin Sanjiu retrieved the mouthpart while one of her feet landed heavily on Zhong Junkai's face. He fell to the ground before he could even retaliate. He was unable to pull himself up even after some time. That one kick had scattered his wave of courage, and he held his wounded face. In the first place, he was unwilling to fight, and now, the pain from his nose exceeded the anger he felt from getting hit.

Lin Sanjiu gave him a sideways glance and then ignored him. She turned and walked in the direction where Old Wang and Lara were standing previously. However, she was flabbergasted when she discovered that there was no one there. [Where are they?]

"You idiot! They were just using you as a distraction! They pushed you out here to die, using you as a human shield. How could you just attack without any consideration!?"

"Huh?" Zhong Junkai's fair face turned even whiter. Blood from his nose covered half his face as he stood up suddenly. "La... Lara? I'm alright. Where are you?"

His anxious voice wafted through the dark, empty space, traveling through the tall walls and slowly faded away. It was barely a meaningless murmur when it reached Lara.

Old Wang, who was currently panting like an ox, looked at Lara and asked, "So, we're just going to abandon him like that?"

The petite, young woman didn't answer him. The wind teased her side-parted fringe revealing her cold, collected expression.

"Leaving him like this, he'll... he'll die of hunger too. Haha..." Old Wang wanted to wipe the sweat from his face, but he was so frail that he couldn't even lift his arms. "Well, you took so much effort to find a stupid, rich man's child like him..."

"Why do have so much bullsh*t to say?" Lara rolled her eyes at him, annoyed, though she was actually a little taken aback. "I don't

know what you're talking about," Lara defended as they reached a fork. Lara stopped abruptly and thought for a moment before she sighed and chose the left path.

Old Wang quickly chased after her while he continued, "I met Zhong Junkai's father some time back..." They had not even walk for half a minute when they realized that the path led to a dead end. To their bodies, this was equivalent to another half a day without food, and they could feel their stomach spewing gastric juices... Lara was so hungry that she felt as though her stomach would just consume all her other organs. When she heard what Old Wang said, she swept her bloodshot eyes at him. "So?"

As she replied, both of them turned back and chose the other path. "He lost financial support from his family for a few years because of some random girl from nowhere. In the end, his father couldn't stand it any longer and brought back his own son..." Old Wang chuckled, "This world has already been destroyed, yet you still choose to be by his side?"

When Lara saw another tall wall standing before her, she suddenly felt a crazy frustration which made her want to just tug her own hair and scream out loud. Luckily, when they walked another few steps forward, they discovered a small path at the left side of the wall. Lara let out a sigh of relief before she countered, "Did you just call me 'a random girl from nowhere'? It is none of your business whether I was targeting his money or his possessions. It is already the end of the world, why do you still have so much rubbish to say?"

Just then, they saw a plastic notice on the wall in front of them. It pattered noisily as the wind blew at it. Both of them approached the notice suspiciously. Old Wang tore down the plastic notice and turned it over as he mumbled to himself, "What is this drawing..."

There was no reply as a sudden silence invaded the air. Next, a resounding gulp broke this silence. Old Wang could sense Lara suddenly walking forward, he turned to look behind and was

instantly dumbfounded.

There was a lunchbox right in the middle of the path. The warm air around them heated the lunchbox and carried the beautiful fragrance of that fully packed lunchbox. That tantalizing smell was strong enough to even lure out their intestines. How long had it been since they had last seen a properly cooked meal? They could see that emerald green, chopped spring onion atop a bright, large yellow omelet which looked as though it was so thick that they might not be able to bite through it in one mouth. Then, they saw that fleshy pig trotter, well-wrapped in soft tendons and collagen which shone with a layer of red oil. This created a contrast with the green fried Chinese broccoli beside it, making the vegetable look even more appetizing.

The two of them took a few steps forward hazily. Then, they rushed toward that lunchbox.

"No, there is something wrong... Didn't Mr. Dot say that there will be a dinner table?" Old Wang tried his best to keep his saliva in his mouth. As his tongue was bathed in saliva, he couldn't even speak properly. "This isn't a portion for four, either..."

"Why don't you explain to me where this food came from?" Lara didn't even pause to look up. She snatched a large piece of that oily, fluffy omelet and stuffed it into her mouth as if she was afraid that she might lose out if she was too slow. "Can't you see that there are four items here?!"

She chewed hastily, in a perfunctory manner, eagerly swallowing the egg down hoping that it would quickly erase that hunger in her stomach.

When Old Wang saw her eating, he quickly grabbed a pig trotter and small scoop of rice. He opened his mouth wide and stuffed both items in. "Umm... Delicious. It's really delicious..."

The taste was heavenly. It wasn't because he was too hungry, but the food itself was really very delicious. The pig trotter was well-

marinated, and that fatty flesh simply melted once it was in his mouth. A glorious flavor erupted in his mouth. Old Wang knew that it wasn't healthy to just eat meat after so many days of hunger, so as he thought about that, he forced himself to chew a little more thoroughly before swallowing the meat from the pig trotters.

Just when he was about to reach for the omelet, he noticed that Lara stopped chewing. Her cheeks were stuffed with omelet as she stared straight at him.

Old Wang quickly took the opportunity to grab a handful of omelet. He looked at her warily for a split second before also stuffing the omelet into his mouth.

Plop. Lara's stiff body fell to the ground with her eyes wide opened. She spurted a mixture of white froth and half-eaten Chinese broccoli from her mouth. Before Old Wang could even react to what had happened, his vision turned black. Two minutes after both had died, a person staggered out from a corner.

"[An inedible lunch]? Why is it here?" Lin Sanjiu, with a pale face, was boggled by the scene in front of her. Two stiff corpses laid among the overturned mess of rice and half-eaten side dishes, and their skins were gradually turning yellow. Lin Sanjiu stared at them for a long time before she could finally react. She crouched down and quickly searched Old Wang's pocket.

She gently carried the motionless B.Rabbit from his pocket and saw the breathing movements of its little belly.

"You scared me..." Lin Sanjiu sighed a breath of relief as she placed the rabbit into the pocket of her combat pants. The tempting fragrance of the poisonous food wafted into her nose, so she pinched her own forearm to stop herself from attacking the food.

However, a dark figure suddenly rushed out from behind her and grabbed the food and even let out a low growl. Responding quickly,

Lin Sanjiu kicked the person away and dragged him backward, shouting, "Don't eat it! Can't you see that they both died of poisoning?!"

Zhong Junkai noticed his girlfriend's stiff corpse, her face had already turned a bright yellow. He forgot about the pig trotter instantly as he sat on the ground. He had the urge to back away and also to crawl forward, but in the end, he remained in the same spot. "Miss... Miss Lin, how did this happen?"

Lin Sanjiu looked at him, baffled, "Isn't this your item? It is a special item called [An inedible lunch]!"

[An inedible lunch] was an item that Lin Sanjiu had won in the first game. Since Lara and Old Wang had eaten the lunch in that lunchbox without any hesitation, that item was clearly not theirs, so apart from herself and B.Rabbit, the only possible owner would be Zhong Junkai.

However, Zhong Junkai shook his head violently while he stared at the food, "No! No! No! It's not mine. That's not mine!"

Lin Sanjiu frowned as she ruminated. "Ah!" she suddenly exclaimed hitting her forehead. During the first round, many of the offered items were taken away as a penalty and placed in the chest. This meant that the items she received might not necessarily be from the Red Team. She found it pretty useless so she offered it as a prize in the second game and lost it to the White Team. If that was the case, the item most likely returned to its original owner. Next, the owner set up this trap which then caused the death of two Red Team members.

"This maze is big. If both teams start from one side of the maze and meet here..." Lin Sanjiu mumbled softly to herself. She stepped over the corpses and continued forward. "We must be near the center of the maze."

[That specific area could not be situated nearer to the sides as it would be unfair...] as she thought of this, she suddenly perked up

and looked around. "Could the dinner table be nearby?"

Chapter 85: Who is it?

After reaching a successive number of dead ends, Lin Sanjiu had no choice but to turn back. Due to Zhong Junkai's physical condition, Lin Sanjiu had already lost him at some intersection. Within this massive maze with a seemingly endless number of paths, she could only hear her own weak breathing.

Lin Sanjiu had no energy to run so she could only drag herself forward. Supporting herself with the walls, pushing forward step by step, she had no idea where she was heading. When she reached a fork once again, she could no longer endure any longer and sat heavily on the ground. After she found Old Wang and Lara's corpses, she pushed herself to move faster, but she was still unable to find that specific area even after ten minutes.

That was another ten days without food. In total, she had not eaten for almost two months. A normal person would have died long ago. Even though she was not dead yet, she felt like she was going to die even with her Overall Physical Enhancement. Her vision had been blurry for a long time, and she felt bouts of dizziness, she could also hear illusionary sounds of waves in her ears getting louder and louder.

If this continued, she knew that she would become unconscious, and then she will die.

"Ssss!" She felt a sharp pain in her leg. It dragged her out of her reverie. Lin Sanjiu opened her eyes and realized that she had fallen to the ground. Her hand trembled as she reached for her thigh.

"What... What?"

Lin Sanjiu pulled out B.Rabbit from her pocket, holding his ears. He had probably just woken up, and his eyes were still unfocused. His mouth was still moving, and he was making a nibbling sound. Lin Sanjiu carried him up and scolded him with a hoarse voice, "Why did you bite my leg?"

B.Rabbit regained a little of its sense. "Huh? Huh? That was your leg. I thought it was grass..."

[That is just the design of my pants!] Lin Sanjiu wanted to yell that out, but she didn't have the strength to move her mouth.

"Hey, did you save me?" B.Rabbit asked feebly as he regained his consciousness though he still looked like he was near his deathbed. "Thank... Thank you."

"Um..." Lin Sanjiu looked as ghastly with her pallid lips.

Both their minds were in a haze of hunger. They laid on the ground for a while and finally started to drink quite a few mouthful of water from the puddles on the floor. After they swallowed those large gulps of muddy water, they seemed to have managed to trick their stomachs, so they felt a little better. This must be the reason why she heard that people would resort to eating mud when they were starving.

Since they were thinking straight again, they had to continue searching. Lin Sanjiu wanted to move while she felt that she still had some energy.

"Wait!" B.Rabbit, who was sitting on her shoulder, suddenly said. He lifted his small nose in the air, it quivered rapidly as if he had picked up a scent.

Even though his physical enhancements could not compare to that of Lin Sanjiu's, as a rabbit, his hearing and sense of smell were naturally superior to humans. After a few seconds, B.Rabbit turned to Lin Sanjiu and said, "I can smell a faint scent of blood from the left path."

"Let's check it out!" Lin Sanjiu immediately perked up.

The left path was very long, and after a few turns, they reached another fork. If B.Rabbit didn't lead the way by sniffing that undetectable scent of blood, Lin Sanjiu would have gotten lost. She mobilized all the energy she had and ran for five minutes until she

felt that she would lose her consciousness the very next second. Finally, she noticed something weird.

"Blood... Bloodstains?" Lin Sanjiu's body only had a bit of mud to digest over that space of five days. She was really at her limits, and it showed on her deep-sunken cheeks. B.Rabbit didn't have the strength to stay on Lin Sanjiu's shoulder so she placed him in her pocket. He poked his head out of her pocket and looked at the path ahead.

The few drops of blood on the floor formed a trail which continued down the path. For an instant, a thought, which even shocked her, flashed in her mind: [If there's no food, it would be good to even have some blood to drink.] Lin Sanjiu spent a great effort before she got back her rationality.

"Should we go over?" B.Rabbit asked weakly. "It could be dangerous."

"If we don't go over, we won't last much longer anyway." Lin Sanjiu was very dizzy, and she didn't know how she could still walk. She supported herself with the walls and followed the trail of blood. Bit by bit, she walked into that dimly-lit path with her wobbling legs.

She felt that she must have brushed past death too many times, her eyesight was failing as patches of darkness filled her vision. She moved forward mechanically and squinted her eyes subconsciously. Suddenly, she realized that she was walking toward a bright light.

[Light? Where did it come from?]

"Is... Is there another person coming?"

Lin Sanjiu heard an unfamiliar female's voice, it was soft and hoarse as if it took a lot of energy for that person to say that. Lin Sanjiu quivered a little as she looked up and realized that something was wrong.

She walked forward muddle-headed, so she did not notice until now that there were many people standing in the same path. The woman with the red mini skirt stood closest to Lin Sanjiu. Her mini skirt was covered with dust, and she was obviously the person who spoke just moments before. There were also two other people, one was tall, and the other was shorter. It was Hai Tianqing whose face had turned green due to hunger and Hu Changzai. The Loser from the first game was leaning against the wall as he gave Lin Sanjiu a dark stare.

Lin Sanjiu could easily tell who the owner of the blood was. It belonged to Flowery shirt with a broken leg caused by Lin Sanjiu. That man laid on the ground rigidly, his hands were wrapped tightly around his throat. The blood, which sprayed from his throat, covered a long distance. He was definitely dead.

However, all this did not draw as much attention as that warm light coming from her left

Behind a clean glass door, a lamp illuminated an enclosed space with a warm, orange light. Under such lighting, the dinner table covered with a white cloth looked even more inviting, and the clear drinking glasses shined brightly like diamonds. Logically speaking, the door should have blocked the fragrance from the food, yet Lin Sanjiu was convinced that she could smell the delightful scent of the food within those four cloches.

That was the dinner table!

Lin Sanjiu stared at it with widened eyes, and just as she was about to move, she spotted a metallic item flying toward her. Perhaps because of the motivation, she gained from the food in front of her, Lin Sanjiu felt a rush of energy. She called out her card and pulled out a mouthpart. She waved it and deflected the weapon within the time of a single breath.

"Clang!" The item fell to the ground, and Lin Sanjiu found out that it was a steel needle.

The red skirt woman wore a threatening expression and made a gesture as another steel needle appeared in her hand. The other young man also stepped forward, clenching his fist tightly.

"You're really quite unlucky!" Though the woman in the red skirt could only smile weakly, it did not cover up her viciousness. "We even got rid of our own extra member... Do you think we will spare an opponent like you!?"

Despite knowing early on that the woman was not someone to be trifled with, Lin Sanjiu was still stunned. "There might only be four portions of food, but if everyone shared the food, we would still survive. Why do you have to kill?"

Her question was answered by an attack coming from the young man. He held a sickle-like weapon in his hand and waved it toward Lin Sanjiu's face. But before it even got close to Lin Sanjiu's face, the young man was hit by a muscular arm. He flew backward hitting the black wall, and blood sprayed out from his mouth. When he slid down from the wall, both his eyes were tightly shut. He had lost consciousness.

"What are you doing?" The long-legged woman was shocked. She stepped away from Hai Tianqing.

"Why are you helping her?"

"Sorry, she is actually our companion."

Hai Tianqing did not say anything. Instead, it was Hu Changzai, who said that as he nodded apologetically. "We will try our best to end the game before you die of hunger."

"You must be joking!" the long-legged woman roared angrily, but her legs were shaking uncontrollably. "Are you idiots? The losing team will lose everything... Which of you are willing to lose this Challenge? Companion? Companion, my ass!"

Even though Hu Changzai was very pale, he was very composed. Hearing what that woman said, he looked at Lin Sanjiu and

repositioned his spectacles. "Are you sure you have a way to deal with this?"

"I am about pretty confident." Lin Sanjiu gasped and laughed lightly. Just then, a rabbit poked out from her pocket and greeted Hai Tianqing, "Hi, Executive Hai."

"It feels like I haven't seen you for a long time, Rabbit." Hai Tianqing looked relieved after he saw B.Rabbit. "Well, we are finally together again."

The long-legged woman crumbled to the ground hopelessly as if she realized instantly that the advantage that she had was now gone. She mumbled something to herself, but it was inaudible to the rest.

Lin Sanjiu couldn't muster a hint of pity for the vicious woman that was before her, but she could not understand the despair which showed on the woman's face. Just when she turned to Hu Changzai with a puzzled expression, the latter grimaced. "It isn't that we don't want to share the food, but... look."

Lin Sanjiu looked at where he pointed and saw a few lines of words on the glass door:

"A table laid out for four people should be for four people.

Only four people can walk through this door.

Throwing food out of this door is forbidden and punishable by death."

Lin Sanjiu could now comprehend the woman's despair. Death by starvation seemed to be an unavoidable fate for that woman...

Lin Sanjiu thought about it, feeling perplexed. She followed her companions and sat down at the table. Just a few minutes before, she was going up against her own team members within the dark confines of the maze, she had witnessed her team members poisoned, and then she was confronted by the White Team. Yet now, they found themselves in a clean, decorated space. They were

sitting under a bright light, they were holding their cutleries and preparing themselves for a meal. This all felt very unreal to her.

Lin Sanjiu lifted the cloche and smelled a warm, appetizing fragrance. Lin Sanjiu's heart beat so fast that she thought that she might get a heart attack. She felt as though there was a monster in her stomach which was howling for her to gobble down the food in front of her.

"Huh?" She hesitated, holding a ladle in her hand.

All the dishes were covered with a plastic wrap. Whether it was that lavish-looking, warm red soup with floating slices of carrot, that soft like cotton bread, or that green, refreshing salad...

A few eye-grabbing words were written on a piece of yellow paper attached to the top of the plastic wraps.

Fourth game: [Among the four of you, who is Mr. Dot?]

Chapter 86: Who Do You Suspect?

A warm, orange light lit up the dinner table, covered with a snow-white tablecloth. The cutleries and plates reflected the same warm, gentle light. Meanwhile, three people and a rabbit sat around the clean, elegant set-up with deadpan expressions. Fortunately, being in Hyperthermal Hell, they did not worry about the food getting cold. For some reasons, though all of them were almost starving to death, they only stared at the steaming food in front of them, while none of them moved.

"I can't. I can't stand it anymore!" B.Rabbit shouted after some time. Being the most impatient among them, he was the first one to "break". He leaped onto the table and yelled out, "I don't give a damn! Even if I become a ghost, I don't want to die hungry!" With that, he scratched open the plastic wrap with his paws and threw it to one side. Before the other could stop him, the rabbit thrust his head into his bowl of soup, and then they heard weird gurgling sounds as he drank the soup noisily.

Lin Sanjiu was so hungry that her limbs felt incredibly weak, yet she immediately pulled the rabbit's hind legs, urging, "Calm down. Don't eat that. Vomit it out!"

While she said that, she forced herself to look away from the food as if afraid to see those steaming, tantalizing dishes.

Hai Tianqing and Hu Changzai also helped pull the rabbit out of the bowl in a hurry; however, it was too late. B.Rabbit had finished drinking that bowl of red soup within five seconds, leaving the bowl totally empty.

There was half a slice of carrot on his face, and its legs were held down by all three people. Even so, the rabbit tried to shake the carrot into his mouth. As he chewed, his words came out muffled, "Ahh... I finally got to eat... Ha..."

The fur stuck on half of B.Rabbit face was wet and tangled into

locks. Yet, B.Rabbit looked satisfied and did not show a single shred of regret. Lin Sanjiu was speechless when she saw him. After some time, she slammed a paper on the table and berated him with her weak voice, "You saw this letter, right? How can you act so rashly? You better wish that there is no problem with the food!"

That piece of clean, thick paper shifted slightly, and the words on it seemed to appear much clearer under the light.

"Dear contestants,

"How are you? I am the host of the Red vs. White Challenge, Mr. Dot. I am very happy that I could sit here with all of you at this dinner table.

"I think all of you must be shocked when you saw that previous hint. Actually, you don't need to be shocked since there is little I can't do in this place. I impersonated one of you here after the end of the first game, but you don't have to worry. That person or rabbit is currently safe, and he is probably sleeping.

"You might be wondering why I chose to infiltrate your group; that is because I discovered that all of you were companions much earlier. How should this game proceed? Well, please read my words carefully.

"There is a piece of voting paper under each of your dinner plates, and you will find four pens in the cutlery holder. Please write down the name of the person you suspect is Mr. Dot. Next, flip your paper and place it in the middle of the table. Once everyone has finished voting, I will stand up and admit my identity if you're correct. You have only one chance, and you cannot amend your vote.

"Something you must note is that a person would only be effectively recognized as the 'suspected impersonator, Mr. Dot' if that person receives two votes. What does that mean? Here is an example: If both Hai Tianqing and Hu Changzai from the White Team suspect that Lin Sanjiu from the Red Team is Mr. Dot, they

will both vote for Lin Sanjiu. Once Lin Sanjiu receives two votes, she will be recognized as a suspect, and if she is the true Mr. Dot, this would be considered a win for the White Team.

"However, if both voted two different people so that Lin Sanjiu and B.Rabbit each get one vote, there will effectively be no suspect. Under such circumstances, even if Lin Sanjiu was the real Mr. Dot, the White Team will not win.

"After reading to this point, you might be wondering to yourself: What should I do if my team member is Mr. Dot? If you suspect that your team member is Mr. Dot, you will have to express your opinion and convince the members of the opposite team to vote for your team member. If you and the others voted for the right person, then you will also be treated as a winner. If you all voted for the wrong person, there will be no winners, and we will proceed to an additional fifth game.

"Likewise, if there is no effective suspect chosen, we will also proceed to the fifth game. Alright, that is the end of the rules. The 'one minute is equivalent to one day without food' condition still applies, so please enjoy the delicious meal while you discuss!

"Your sincerely, Mr. Dot.

"PS: Out of the four portions, [Versu Poison], a special item, has been added to one of them. I am the only one who knows which dish is poisoned so you might want to eat only after knowing who is the real Mr. Dot."

"He actually tried to gloss over such an important matter by adding a PS..." Lin Sanjiu grumbled softly. The churning acid in her stomach made her even have the urge to gnaw the table. The only thing that was definitely safe was that flask of clean water in the middle of the table. Apart from B.Rabbit, the others could only drink water continuously, attempting to trick their stomach.

B.Rabbit laid beside his own dinner table, looking up. Somehow, he was now chewing on a piece of raw vegetable from his dish of

salad, "It's alright! I already considered the possibilities. There is only a 25% probability that the food is poisoned. I am willing to take that risk! Besides, if I don't die, all of you can eat my leftovers. Temporarily, this is a way that you won't die of hunger..."

Even though he sounded quite righteous, from the speed that he was eating, he didn't seem like he would leave them much food.

Hu Changzai was so hungry that his face was green, he leaned back in his chair. His spectacles were crooked, but he didn't have the strength readjust them. Hai Tianqing swallowed two gulps of water, then, as if using all the willpower he had in his life, he covered up the three other portions.

When the smell of the food was not as strong, Lin Sanjiu heave a sigh of relief as she rested on the table. It was too late for B.Rabbit, whose stomach was slowly bulging. They only hoped that he hadn't picked the wrong dish.

They did not expect that even after finding this space, the risk of death by starvation was not dispelled; instead, it became even more traumatic. This game was very difficult for all of them. None of them knew who to suspect. After all, they were companions who had fought alongside each other.

There was a stagnant atmosphere as none of them spoke for some time. The silence was broke with a hiccup. All of them turned to look at B.Rabbit who stared back at them with his big black eyes. He hiccuped again and rubbed his own stomach. "Umm... I am so full now. I don't think my portion was poisoned. Do you want some?"

There was still a large piece of pan fried butter fish fillet in the rabbit's dinner plate.

[That's right, B.Rabbit doesn't eat meat!] They had just managed to calm down, but now their eyes flashed with delight. At that point, no one wanted to say another word. They quickly cut the fillet and shared it among the three of them.

Lin Sanjiu ate her fish fillet with large bites as she scanned the people around her. [Is Mr. Dot really among us? Is he really acting like he is as hungry as all of us? Is he eating ravenously like all of us?]

After sharing, each of them didn't have much fish on their plates. However, after swallowing that warm, tender, and juicy fish, Lin Sanjiu felt as if she suddenly came alive again. When her long empty stomach was filled with some meat, she suddenly felt waves of pain from her stomach.

"Who the hell is Mr. Dot?" Lin Sanjiu said frustratedly as she pushed her plate, revealing a red voting paper beneath, which was probably prepared for the Red Team. She took the paper and asked, "How should we find him?"

Hu Changzai who regained a little of his energy, pushed up his spectacles and looked at each of them carefully. He shook his head and said, "I have no idea, everyone looks the same. But I can tell if any of you lied, but then there is no way for you to verify that I am not Mr. Dot... After all, he mentioned in his letter that there is little he can't do here."

"Damn it!" B.Rabbit cursed, panting from being too full. "No matter what, I don't want to join the fifth game! We must find Mr. Dot!"

"Why don't we each say something that could prove our identities?" Hai Tianqing suggested after being silent for some time. It was quite a good idea. "Mr. Dot probably doesn't know what happened before we came here."

"That makes sense... I'll start first." Hu Changzai was the first to agree. He thought for a moment and said, "Xiao Jiu saved me once."

Lin Sanjiu nodded and continued, "I was the one who suggested that we should take a bath."

"Her Active ability is one of the most useless ability I have ever seen." B.Rabbit pointed at Lin Sanjiu with his paw, and she rolled her eyes.

Hai Tianqing lowered his head and said softly, "I had a wife and two daughters in the past."

After one round of "confession", the four of them looked at each other as none of them made a mistake. It was surprising that Mr. Dot didn't expose himself.

Hu Changzai gave a wry smile, "I can tell that none of you lied."

All of them sighed. [What should we do? Does this mean that Mr. Dot knows his target's entire history if he impersonates that person?]

All of them couldn't help feeling very confused. After a while, Lin Sanjiu looked at each of them. Somehow, they all lowered their heads avoiding eye contact. She paused and finally said what she had been thinking for some time: "If that's the case, why don't we reveal who we suspect is Mr.Dot?"

Once she said that, the previously rather light-hearted atmosphere immediately changed.

Chapter 87: The Voting Outcome

Lin Sanjiu would never have imagined that she would be the first person to be suspected.

"That's why I feel that Xiao Jiu is the most suspicious." Hu Changzai turned his head away from Lin Sanjiu, trying to avoid her eyes. He continued, stammering, "No matter how I think about it, I don't know how she can discover a way to prevent our abilities from being stripped..."

Lin Sanjiu gaped at him, then she couldn't help looking at both Hai Tianqing and B.Rabbit. Hai Tianqing suddenly focused his attention on the items on the table, he started playing with a fork as if he had never seen such cutlery before. Whereas B.Rabbit buried his head in his plate, showing only his furry little backside. "Actually, I think that you're a little weird too..." he said with muted tone.

"Now that you brought this up," Hai Tianqing, who had been silent all this time, finally nodded his head, "I agree. When we were recounting our experiences, she brought up an event which was closest to the time when we entered this pocket dimension."

Hearing this, Lin Sanjiu was so anxious that she felt cold sweat would fall from her forehead any minutes. "Please don't make such conclusions so quickly! I am really not Mr. Dot!"

Once she said that, Hu Changzai narrowed his eyes and looked at her carefully before he slowly said, "She is not lying."

Before Lin Sanjiu could let out a sigh of relief, B.Rabbit lifted his pair of black eyes and peered at Hu Changzai suspiciously, "Forget it... Isn't your ability useless right now? Or could it be that you're Mr. Dot? Maybe you said that on purpose so that she will let down her guard and we would acknowledge you at the same time..."

Hu Changzai stood up from his chair, worriedly. "What do you

mean? If that is so, aren't you even more suspicious? You know that the food might be poisoned, yet you still chose to eat!"

"Bullsh*t! That's because I'm hungry! Besides, if I were really Mr. Dot, wouldn't I avoid doing that!"

"Well, not necessarily. Maybe you just want to act like you don't care because it is easier to get others to believe you that way..."

"Since you are so experienced, then you are definitely Mr. Dot!"

"Rabbit! How could you accuse him, then accuse me? Who do you actually..."

As the squabbling got louder and louder, Hai Tianqing could no longer stand it. "Stop quarreling!" he shouted angrily as he slammed his hand on the table. This shook the silver cutlery and glassware, and a broken wooden placemat fell to the ground.

"You'll speak one at a time! Just point out your suspicion. Don't bring up your baseless conjectures!" Hai Tianqing's voice reverberated through the silent enclosed space, clearly portrayed his gruff Northern Chinese nature. "We all want to know who is the real Mr. Dot. So don't get angry or anxious if someone else suspects you! Understood!?"

No one said a word, and B.Rabbit finally broke the silence after a while: "I thought about it, and I think that Xiao Jiu can't be Mr. Dot. You don't know how many sh*theads tried to catch me and eat me up while I don't have one of my Active abilities. Xiao Jiu was the one who saved me," while he said that, he stroked his own fur. "Mr. Dot would never choose to do such a unrewarding thing."

"If that's so, who is it?" Hu Changzai asked as he scratched his head, perplexed.

Lin Sanjiu stared at him and suddenly said coldly, "Aren't you the one?"

Her words immediately drew the attention of everyone. B.Rabbit and Hai Tianqing turned their eyes to Hu Changzai.

"Just now, I was in a hurry to prove that I wasn't Mr. Dot so I didn't think about this carefully." Lin Sanjiu held her own chin as she scrutinized Hu Changzai. She continued with an indifferent expression, "Let's put it that way. If Mr. Dot chose to be anyone other than you, you would immediately discover his identity once he denies being Mr. Dot, right?"

Hu Changzai nodded blankly, it looked as if he had not caught on to Lin Sanjiu's track of thought.

"According to Hu Changzai's personality, he would definitely point out who Mr. Dot is once he discovered something... Even though Mr. Dot could say something to distract the others, this would be too risky," Lin Sanjiu explained to Hai Tianqing and B.Rabbit, "But if Mr. Dot chose to be Hu Changzai, there wouldn't be this risk."

"Not only will this reduce his risk, but because he knows that we are who we are, he could even act as if he could confirm that we are not lying. This will also help reduce our doubts about him..."

[That's right! That must be it.] B.Rabbit's ears twitched as he exchanged a glance with Hai Tianqing.

"On top of that, I found something very odd," Lin Sanjiu said expressionlessly as she looked at the sweat pouring from Hu Changzai's forehead — whenever she looked at an enemy, her face would turn cold and stoic. "Hu Changzai still hasn't developed the Physical Enhancement passive ability, so how could he survive two months of hunger? Logically speaking, he should have died of starvation!"

Like a sudden clap of thunder, these words shocked everyone, and their expressions changed. Hu Changzai looked at the suspicious faces around him and finally sighed after some time, "I can explain, but I am sure none of you will believe me."

B.Rabbit stared at him solemnly and said, "Just tell us."

"When the maze first appeared, I really felt like I was going to die immediately after 43 days of hunger. However, during the week when Xiao Jiu was unconscious for a week, I had to feed her some cracker paste a couple of times every day, so I had the habit of keeping a packet of crackers in my pocket. At first, I survived on the crackers. Executive Hai knows about it."

Hai Tianqing nodded, confirming what he said. Lin Sanjiu was stunned, she didn't know that something like that would happen...

"However, every minute is equivalent to one day, so how can a packet of crackers last me for one month?"

"That's why I said that you will not believe me." Hu Changzai sighed, "When I finished the packet of crackers, I became weaker and weaker. It was difficult to even walk, and in the end, I lost Executive Hai and the others. Just as I fell to the ground and thought that I would die of hunger, I developed the Physical Enhancement passive ability. This was how I survived until Executive Hai came back for me..."

[Isn't this too much of a coincidence? Just when no one was around, he developed the Physical Enhancement at that critical moment?] Lin Sanjiu thought to herself.

"You didn't tell me about this?" Hai Tianqing frowned and said suspiciously.

Hu Changzai gave a wry smile and said, "The others were around at that time!"

No one could verify Hu Changzai's explanation. Everyone grew silent again as none of them could make a confident choice. After thinking for some time, Lin Sanjiu was reminded about the reality of their situation when she felt a sharp hunger pang. That bit of fish she just ate seemed like nothing considering the days of hunger. Enduring the bouts of dizziness caused by her low blood sugar, she grabbed a pen and her voting paper. Without looking at Hu Changzai, she said, "If we continue discussing, we will all die of

hunger. I'm not discussing this any longer. Let's just vote."

Hu Changzai suddenly panicked. He looked at B.Rabbit then at Hai Tianqing, before he pleaded, "You won't vote me, right? I am really not Mr. Dot..."

Lin Sanjiu ignored his desperate expression and quickly wrote down a name on her voting paper. Spurred by her action, Hai Tianqing also lowered his head and also wrote a name on his own voting paper. B.Rabbit could not write with his paw, so he looked around and paused at Lin Sanjiu before choosing her to write on his behalf. "Xiao Jiu, help me write that name. I want to vote for him."

Hearing that, Hu Changzai was totally dejected, "We're finished. We will need to play the fifth game."

Within a few seconds, as he moaned and sighed, there were two pieces of red paper and one white paper in the middle of the table. The two members of the Red Team and Hai Tianqing had finished voting.

Even if he was the primary suspect, he still had to vote. Hu Changzai looked at his other three companions. He finally clenched his teeth and wrote a name on his voting paper before placing his vote with the other three pieces of paper.

Once the four pieces of paper were placed in the center of the table, all of them were so nervous that they could hear their own hearts beating. Lin Sanjiu's throat felt dry. She suddenly doubted her previous conjecture and looked at Hu Changzai with unease. She couldn't resist any longer and said with a soft voice, "It's time to vote... Hai Tianqing, why don't you reveal the votes?"

The tall, muscular man kept his silence for a few seconds before he reached for the votes hesitantly. He opened the first vote — it was Hu Changzai's vote.

The name "B.Rabbit" was written on the white piece of paper.

B.Rabbit scoffed at it disdainfully as he threw a sidelong glance at Hu Changzai. "Did you choose me out of desperation?"

"No... No... I just thought that the person least likely to be the culprit would usually be the right person... That's how it is with novels, right?" Hu Changzai gave a feeble excuse.

Hai Tianqing coughed to grabbed everyone's attention once more. He opened the second vote, which was his.

The rough handwriting on the paper showed the name: "Hu Changzai".

Hu Changzai was not surprised, he just gave a resigned sigh. Next, Hai Tianqing was going to reveal the votes from the Red Team. They did not know who Lin Sanjiu and B.Rabbit voted for.

Hai Tianqing used his large fingers and carefully pried open the third vote. "Hai Tianqing" was written clearly on that piece of paper.

"You must be joking?" His brows suddenly furrowed as he stared at Lin Sanjiu. Now, three of them each had one vote. That is to say, there could only be one suspect...

Lin Sanjiu took a deep breath as she looked at the fourth piece of paper. When it was turned over, the name: "Hai Tianqing" was revealed. Absolute silence enveloped the entire enclosed space.

Chapter 88: What Happened After They Consumed Poison

Hai Tianqing stared hard at the four votes on the table, and a darker and more complex expression overtook his face. It was as if he could not accept that he was the only suspect. The air seemed to stop moving, and the heavy atmosphere weighed over their heads and shoulders. After some time had passed, Hai Tianqing lifted his head suddenly and glared at Lin Sanjiu.

"Eh... I thought I acted really well. How did you find out that I was the one?"

He was no longer speaking in Hai Tianqing's usual deep voice, but instead, he was using the same voice that they had heard countless times, the voice which came from the white fog. It had a light-hearted, cheerful timbre — that which belonged to Mr. Dot.

"Crash!" There was a loud noise as Hu Changzai suddenly knocked over his own chair and quickly moved multiple steps away from Hai Tianqing, or rather Mr. Dot. He stood some distance away from the man as fear filled his face. B.Rabbit's fur also flared as he went into a defensive position.

From the start, Mr. Dot was hidden within the white fog, they had only seen his voice and his handwriting, so no one knew what he was. Realizing that he was sitting so closely with them on the same table, each of them couldn't help feeling a little frightened.

"What's wrong? Didn't I already tell you that I am here in this room?" Mr. Dot was quite unhappy when he saw their reactions and was offended. "You don't need to be so scared!"

Lin Sanjiu had also instinctively shifted her chair away from the table when she heard him speak. Noticing that he did not sound like he would harm them, she asked with some lingering fear in her voice, "Umm... Excuse me, but where is Hai Tianqing?"

"That huge bloke must be sleeping," even though she was seeing Hai Tianqing's face, the person's tone and way of speaking were totally different. Lin Sanjiu wouldn't be able to adjust to this so quickly if she had not experienced the incident with 12. Mr. Dot propped half his face with one of Hai Tianqing's large palm as he crooked his head and chuckled, "You don't have to worry. I will bring him back at the end of the Challenge."

With his gesture, the three others were further convinced that the man in front of them was not Hai Tianqing. Lin Sanjiu hesitated for a moment and quickly shot a question concerning their life and death, "Which plate was spiked with [Versu Poison]?"

If they didn't start eating, Hu Changzai and herself wouldn't last much longer. "Oh!" Mr. Dot replied as he reached out and knocked on B.Rabbit's dinner plate.

"This."

B.Rabbit's eyes grew wide as he looked at his own empty plate and then at Mr. Dot's hand. He could only show disbelief as he suddenly shivered and plopped on the table, speechless. In a split second, Lin Sanjiu felt her blood rushing to her head. Not only did B.Rabbit eat the food on that plate, Hu Changzai and herself had also eaten that fish. When she saw B.Rabbit falling, both Hu Changzai and herself called out, "Rabbit!" Just as she was about to rush over to take a closer look, Mr. Dot patted B.Rabbit's tummy. The rabbit's two front paws trembled a little.

Hu Changzai and Lin Sanjiu were stunned. B.Rabbit lifted up his confused face and asked quietly, "Am I dead?"

"Hehe. You just lost consciousness for a moment because you were shocked... Even though [Versu Poison] is indeed a poison, I never said that you would die if you consume it, did I?" Mr. Dot laughed out twice, gleefully. "I also suggested that you should all eat while you discussed... But you wouldn't listen to me. But I have to give it to all of you. Despite your hunger, you quickly discovered

my true identity."

No one replied because when Mr. Dot said the first sentence, Lin Sanjiu and Hu Changzai already rushed over to their own dinner plates. They removed the cloches, ignoring the knives and forks, and just used their hands to stuff their mouths with food. Both of their mouths were filled with food, and they were overwhelmed by the satisfaction that the delicious life-saving food gave to them to the point where they had no mood to listen carefully to what Mr. Dot had to say.

B.Rabbit, who had already eaten his fill, was the only one who still retained his senses. He only managed to calm his rapid heartbeat after taking in a few large gulps of air. "You, you mean [Versu Poison] doesn't kill? Then, what does it do?"

Mr. Dot gazed at the two people who were gobbling their food and listening to him at the same time. He laughed and said, "It's something good. But you have to tell me something first. How did you see through my act?"

Lin Sanjiu's cheeks bulged out like two balls as she continued eating. While she busily stuffed more food into her mouth, she replied, "Basically, it begughf ohf..."

"Speak properly!" Mr. Dot lectured.

Lin Sanjiu quickly drank a mouthful of soup. With the aid of the soup, she swallowed the food within her mouth. Then, she said, "If you want me to explain and analyze the situation, I really can't express it properly. But my instincts told me that your behavior was different. Even though Hu Changzai seemed very suspicious, his behavior wasn't anything out of the ordinary. I could immediately tell that it was him through his personality. As for B.Rabbit, he was also as impatient and impulsive as usual. His behavior was totally in line."

"Just like that?" Mr. Dot tilted his head, unconvinced. He continued, "I observed this very carefully! Whether it was his way

of speaking or his mannerisms, I'm sure I imitated that big bloke very well..."

Hu Changzai who was beside him nodded in agreement as he stuffed pieces of mutton and a handful of vegetable fried rice into his mouth, showing that he thought that Mr. Dot acted really well.

Lin Sanjiu put down the empty bowl of soup reluctantly, she continued explaining, "That's right, you acted perfectly in front of us. If that were it, I wouldn't even suspect you. But, you did a superfluous thing that Hai Tianqing would never do."

Her words also drew the attention of both B.Rabbit and Hu Changzai. Mr. Dot looked at her thoughtfully and seemed to comprehend what she meant. He nodded contemplatively.

"Old Wang and Lara from our team found a lunchbox in the maze. They had the impression that it was the delicious food that you promised, so they ate the food without any hesitation." Lin Sanjiu did not feel as anxious now that she felt some food in her stomach. While she tore the meat off the roast chicken on her plate and added, "But I recognized that lunchbox, it is a special item called [An inedible lunch]. Anyone who ate that food will die very quickly.

"I won that item in the first game, but I found it useless, so I offered it as a prize in the second game. Since the Red Team lost in the second game, it naturally went to the White Team.

"At first, I didn't connect Hai Tianqing with the item. It was only"—she gestured at Hu Changzai—"until you said that you were separated from Hai Tianqing and that he came back with the other members of the White Team.

"At that point, I suddenly remembered something that was seemingly irrelevant. Which person in the White Team would get that item? According to the rules, unless everyone agreed that the item would be given to a particular person, the item would naturally be given to the person who contributed the most to the

game. In the second game, who was most likely to get that item? Hai Tianqing managed to defeat two Red Team members. He was not only the biggest contributor but due to his combative skills, the others wouldn't dare to snatch anything from him. Thus, it became obvious to me who the owner of the item was."

B.Rabbit frowned as he thought about what she said, then he said, "But you can't be sure that it was Executive Hai who set up that trap. It was possible that the long-legged woman took the lunch box from Executive Hai and created that trap..."

Lin Sanjiu munched on a piece of chicken before she spoke in a muffled voice, "Even so, if the woman had asked for that item, Hai Tianqing would have thought of what she was planning. She was definitely targeting us, so why would he give it to her? Not only that, but who pointed out that the woman was the mastermind behind the second game?"

B.Rabbit paused for a moment and instantly understood Lin Sanjiu. That was what Hai Tianqing told him during the second game.

"She didn't look like that sort of scheming person to me," even though she was talking while she was eating, she was quickly finishing the food on the plate. "However, if that woman was just a distraction, everything would make sense."

"Then, why would you lead me to suspect Hu Changzai?" B.Rabbit asked.

"If I brought attention directly to Mr. Dot, who knows what he would say to mess things up?" Lin Sanjiu still felt a little scared when she thought about this. "However, after I voted, I was still very uncertain. I nearly scared myself..."

Mr. Dot repeatedly nodded as he heard what she said. "Ah, I actually didn't have to do that. However, thinking that I already took on that role, I had to play it perfectly... I didn't expect that it would let the cat out of the bag."

He used a subtly strange tone when he said that which made the three of them shut their mouths. Even without her [School of Higher Consciousness], Lin Sanjiu could sense a dangerous atmosphere in the air. Clearly, she was not the only one who had sensed it as her other two companions also grew silent. It was as if they had recognized that the person that who was sitting so close to them was someone whose face they had not even seen.

No. Perhaps they could sense an air of danger because they already guessed that Mr. Dot might not even be human.

"Mr. Dot, this means that the Red Team won, right? Does this mean that the Challenge has ended?" Lin Sanjiu asked cautiously after waiting for some time.

Mr. Dot narrowed his eyes as he smiled. Just when Lin Sanjiu could feel her heart almost leaping out from her throat, she heard him sigh. Almost as if he was reluctant about it, he concluded, "Alright, since you've finished the game. This is the end of the Challenge."

After he said that, the black walls started descending as if they received his command. They quickly slid back into the ground, and the room disappeared along with the maze in a few seconds. The four of them sat at the desolate table, right in the middle of a white fog.

When they looked up, they could see a few people who were probably the members of the White Team.

"The Challenge has ended. Are you ready to receive your rewards and penalties?"

Chapter 89: We Got out of That Pocket Dimension, so Let's Continue on Our Journey...huh?

Hai Tianqing rubbed his face, he felt as if he had been dreaming for a long time. The vague images slowly faded from his mind as he opened his eyes. Appearing a little dazed after waking up, he looked around him and saw three familiar figures.

The warm rain and white fog had dissipated at some unknown point in time, and the stars now shone through the clear night sky. The three figures sat in a circle, with an awkward distance between them. No one could deny that odd but serious atmosphere in the air.

"What are you doing?" Hai Tianqing sat up. When he did this, his temples throbbed painfully. "How did I fall asleep here?" He stood up and walked toward his companions. He intuitively felt that something was wrong, his face turned green.

"Where is my Active ability? Why is my [The glory of a personal trainer] gone?"

Just then, the three figures who had remained rigid for some time started moving. Hu Changzai slowly turned and looked at him. Hai Tianqing wasn't sure if he was imagining it, but he felt that Hu Changzai seemed rather reluctant...

"Executive Hai, you're awake?" his voice seemed forced when he said that. "You don't have to worry. Your ability is with Xiao Jiu. She has some of your special items as well. She will return them to you soon."

"Do you mean that I didn't dream up that weird Challenge?" Hai Tianqing stared at Hu Changzai. His deeply furrowed brows clearly showed his disbelief.

"Yes. That really happened. But it is over."

"What's wrong with your face?" he finally couldn't resist asking.

He could hardly tell Hu Changzai's expression behind all that decorative design on the bespectacled man's face. Hu Changzai laughed dryly. The two set of black lines on his face — arranged like the circuits of a motherboard — curved slightly with his smile. The lines led to his neck and extended past his collar. "In the last game, we accidentally ate something called [Versu Poison]. That's why we look like this now..."

Before Hai Tianqing could cast his eyes at the remaining person and rabbit, Lin Sanjiu and B.Rabbit already showed him their faces, as if resigned to their fate.

Lin Sanjiu's slightly upturned cat-like eyes were surrounded by a complicated flowery design. It was as if someone had added a flowery design to a panda's signature black eyes. Even though it was weird, it actually looked alright after a while.

But when Hai Tianqing saw B.Rabbit, he was dumbfounded.

B.Rabbit wore a leather eye patch on one eye, while his other eye was covered with a smokey eye makeup. He also wore purple lipstick on his lips and a golden ring on its ear. His previous leather collar was missing; instead, he was wearing a spiked collar. His goth makeup made it even harder to ignore the little pink carrot symbols all over its body.

"This is... novel," Hai Tianqing blurted out a comment, unconsciously.

The expressions of both humans and one rabbit instantly fell to the bottom of the valley.

"This is the side effect of consuming [Versu Poison]. A 'decorative' pattern will appear on your face or body," Lin Sanjiu sounded very bitter as she said this, "the designs are determined by the thoughts in your mind at that particular moment."

Hu Changzai looked at both his arms, they were covered with designs like that of computer circuitry. "I heard it as face 'and' body... So I am totally covered with that black pattern."

The goth rabbit did not say a word, but Lin Sanjiu did not spare him. "B.Rabbit's current 'style' is created by a special item. The carrots are the patterns created by the poison... I have no idea why he would think of this pajamas pattern. But the good thing is that this [Versu Poison] is only temporary. It won't last."

Hai Tianqing heaved a sigh of relief after he heard this. He walked toward them, planning to sit down beside B.Rabbit, but before he could bend down, the three of them ran away from him. "Keep your distance away from me!" they all yelled as they scooted away from him at the same time.

"What's wrong with all of you?" Hai Tianqing asked glumly.

Lin Sanjiu let out a long sigh and massaged her own temples.

[Versu Poison]

"Description: Versu Poison is a new, manufactured virus developed by Scicli Pharmaceutical Laboratories. The initial consumer will become a carrier of the virus, but their body will not be harmed by the virus. However, if a person comes in direct contact with a carrier's skin, the virus will be transmitted to them, and they will contract an incurable blood disease. They will die within a short time with blood pouring out from their pores. If two carriers come in contact with each other, both carriers will die. Transmission is not possible without direct skin contact.

"Active Duration: Versu Poison will lose its effects after the carrier has 'poisoned' six persons.

"Side effects: Patterns will appear on a person's face or body according to their thoughts at the time of consumption. This will last for six months."

After Lin Sanjiu explained about the effects of the poison, Hai

Tianqing took the initiative to sit further away from them. As he was twice as large as a normal person, he didn't want to risk touching them accidentally.

"If you think positively, this is quite a good defense. Now, nobody would dare to even touch you. But, what is with B.Rabbit's current fashion and my ability?"

The three of them looked at each other and decided that Lin Sanjiu, who received the least damage from the event, should explain to Hai Tianqing what had happened in the fourth game...

After the fourth game ended, the three people sat at the dinner table, not knowing what to do. They watched as Mr. Dot stood up from his seat and announced the results of the Challenge. They could clearly see the fake Hai Tianqing's mouth opening, but somehow, his voice sounded as if it came from a speaker, and it rang out throughout the entire arena.

Unexpectedly, the four of them were not the only survivors. As Zhong Junkai had fainted earlier on, he managed to conserve his energy and was ironically able to survive. Meanwhile, the long-legged woman was not as lucky, but her will to survive was extremely strong. She squeezed out and drank the blood of her fellow team member and managed to survive till the end.

The badly injured old woman, the loser, and the others had unfortunately passed away. However, unlike the previous time, they could not retrieve the ability from the deceased members because, according to Mr. Dot, they had exceeded their "expiration date".

After he woke Zhong Junkai up and gave him some food, Mr. Dot listed all the abilities of the members of the White Team:

"Hu Changzai had two Active abilities: [Lie Detection], [Truth Bomb].

"Hai Tianqing had one Active ability: [The glory of a personal

trainer], one ability received from B.Rabbit: [All the carrots are mine], and one ability received from Lara Lian: [I can't help loving her at first sight].

"Long-legged woman had one Active ability: [A Twinkle in the Sky]."

They won a total of six abilities, and four of them belonged to their companions so it was really a close game.

However, no matter what it was, the abilities were distributed to the Red Team based on their contributions and how they desired to share the prizes. [All the carrots are mine] and Hu Changzai's abilities were given to B.Rabbit. Hai Tianqing's and the Long-legged woman's abilities were given to Lin Sanju. Even though Zhong Junkai was absent during the fourth game, he was Lara's boyfriend, after all; thus Lin Sanju decided that Lara's ability should belong to him.

Lin Sanju kept the five special items from the White Team well. Her three other companions did not have any good special items, and they definitely needed some. When she added that five items to the three other items she had won and the three other items she had stolen from the old woman, it was indeed a huge haul for her.

After Lin Sanju retrieved three glowing balls of light from the chest and watched as they integrated into her skin, she asked, "Mr. Dot, didn't you mention that we could also request for a special prize?" Lin Sanju did make an effort to remember his words.

Mr. Dot retained Hai Tianqing's form for some reason, not revealing his true appearance. "Sure. Let me know what you want."

Zhong Junkai, who had been lying listlessly, suddenly lit up and forced himself up. Lin Sanju lifted up a corner of the chest and removed a Diary Card she had placed there previously. She looked at the card and scanned its contents quickly, before sighing in relief. She smiled at Mr. Dot and requested, "B.Rabbit and I want this chest."

B.Rabbit was astonished when he realized that Lin Sanjiu took advantage of the situation to represent him, he quickly chipped in unhappily, "Hey, I haven't thought of the prize I want!"

Lin Sanjiu didn't say anything. She showed her Diary Card to B.Rabbit. B.Rabbit pulled down the card with his paw and became speechless when he read its content.

The diary card stated the following: Lin Sanjiu has converted that chest into a card in the second game. As she was afraid that Mr. Dot would punish her, she reverted it back to its original form after only one second. But she had called out her Diary Card before she did that, so the information about the chest was recorded. It also recorded the subsequent transactions; therefore, the function of the chest was completely recorded down.

The chest had the mysterious ability to take a person's ability and store it in a transferable form. With it, they would be able to return Hai Tianqing and Hu Changzai their respective abilities. Not only that, the wooden chest could retrieve the abilities of people who had just died. That means having the wooden chest would be equivalent to having an incredible cheating machine!

"I can't give you this wooden chest." Mr. Dot laughed unexpectedly. "If I give this to you, I will lose it."

Lin Sanjiu, who had been very confident about her plan, was stumped. She had forgotten to consider the possibility that Mr. Dot could reject them. Mr. Dot observed her reaction, unruffled. He seemed pleased to see her look of helplessness. After a while, he smiled and said, "But... I can give you each a replica."

Lin Sanjiu and B.Rabbit were immediately comforted by his words. After they received the replicas of the wooden chest and distributed the special items, they finally completed the Pocket Dimension. When they got out of the Pocket Dimension, they found out that the white fog in the outside world was long gone, and the ruins of their destroyed world were once again displayed

clearly before their eyes. Considering the fact that they had been in the Pocket Dimension for two to three months, the rain would have stopped no matter how long it was supposed to last...

After Lin Sanjiu told Hai Tianqing everything till this point, she opened her palms and called out, "[Rob the Poor to feed the Rich box]." The dark red replica of the wooden chest, which belonged to Mr. Dot, was very small. It was only the size of a lunch box. At most, it could only be called a "wooden box". She placed her hand into the box, looked at Hai Tianqing and said mildly, "This replica is very weak. Each box can only be used twice. Each time, it can only draw out one ability, and it cannot be used on a deceased person. But no matter what, I can still return your ability to you..."

In order to return both abilities to Hu Changzai, B.Rabbit had already used up the two-time usage for his box. Hai Tianqing looked at the box that Lin Sanjiu had passed to him. There was a glowing ball within the box. He reached out his hands, and the ball of light floated toward him as if knowing its way home. It touched his hands and integrated into his skin before it disappeared.

Hai Tianqing exercised his shoulders a bit and confirmed that his ability was back. He nodded at Lin Sanjiu and passed the box back to her. At the same time, he asked a question which bothered him for some time: "Since you all got some special items and you found a way to return my ability to me... why were all of you sitting here motionlessly?"

Without the warm rain pouring down on them, the moon and the stars shone down brightly from the sky. The white fog and strong gale were gone. The sand, which once danced with the wind unbridled, had now been turned to mud due to the rain which had stopped. This weather, without any visual obstructions, was perfect for them to continue on their journey.

Hu Changzai sighed heavily. He spoke, almost as if lamenting, "Executive Hai, do you see our vehicles anywhere?"

"Huh?" Hai Tianqing was stunned, he immediately scanned the surroundings.

At that moment, there were only three humans, including himself, and a rabbit on this empty road. There were a few muddy, decrepit shells of abandoned cars on the sides of the road, a devastated wasteland laid out behind them, and in the far distance, there was a building on the verge of collapsing. Finally, Hai Tianqing was aware that their two vehicles, stocked with food and water, were nowhere to be seen.

"We were in that Pocket Dimension for more than two months... Our vehicles have long been stolen..." Lin Sanjiu said disappointedly behind her covered mouth. "It's all because I can't store huge items into my cards... We had to park them on the side of the road."

Chapter 90: Back on the Road

The countless vehicles on the highway formed a river of steel. The cars surged forward like turbulent currents under the blue road sign as if trying to create an escape path to survive. There was a cacophony of insane car horns, the sounds of crashing cars, the crying screeches and irate arguments, and the aftermath of various collided cars... This horror scene quickly spread and extended...

Until everything suddenly stopped as if someone had pressed a "pause" button.

Lin Sanjiu threaded through the rows of cars stuck in an eternal traffic jam. Apart from her own footsteps and the incessant sound of a car horn coming from a distance, there was silence. It was that same jutting honk which made the highway seemed even more lifeless.

Suddenly, the sharp, annoying blare stopped. Hu Changzai was some distance away from her. He was in front of a car whose original color had already faded beyond recognition. He straightened his back as he complained, "Of all places, he had to die on his car horn."

When Lin Sanjiu heard this, she remembered how Luther had stepped quickly and callously on the backs of multiples corpses — she had been so angry back then. But now, their impression of a dead body had turned from that of unimaginable fear to something that they were so used to seeing that they wouldn't even raise a brow.

The blue sky hung over her as she looked up to read the road sign above. The road sign had been exposed to the sandstorms and high heat for over six months, so it wasn't a mystery that the words on the sign were barely readable. Lin Sanjiu squinted and stood on the spot with her tilted head for several minutes before she eventually made out the words with some guessing. She yelled out to her

companions who were far away from her, "We are 60 kilometers away from Yanping Port!"

"We are still that far?" B.Rabbit sighed as he stood on top of a flatten Volvo, still in his goth makeup. "Why didn't we get a special item which can let us fly?"

Due to their [Versu Poison], they spread themselves out and walked at their own pace. It had already been more than one month since they escaped that weird game-type Pocket Dimension. This one month had been unexpectedly peaceful, apart from the fact that they were often hungry and beleaguered by thirst. It had already been two days since they last ate.

The high temperatures no longer posed a threat to their enhanced body, but it created another problematic situation. Without the water reserve in their vehicles, they naturally thought that they could find some food supplies from supermarkets, food factories or convenient stores... They initially thought that, within this large city, it would be easy to find a supermarket which hadn't been ransacked. However, they were proven wrong by reality.

Vacuum-packed and dried food had all been taken from the shelves. Going to a supermarket was probably the first thing on everyone's mind, so there wasn't even a single bottle of water left in most supermarkets they went to. And those were the supermarkets which still remained intact after the apocalypse. Most of the supermarkets in the city were destroyed along with the entire building they were in. Under the hot weather, they were now merely heaps of rubble.

Nothing. There was no food or drinkable water anywhere. Even the city's reservoirs were dried up, leaving only a shallow sump surrounded by mud.

Just as all of them were getting worried and closer to despair, Lin Sanjiu suddenly thought of a place. If things went well, the water and food supplies stored there would far exceed any supermarket.

In addition to that, not many people would even think about that place: the customs warehouse at the port.

As a flourishing port city, Shenghai City's imports and exports figures were astronomical. Imported consumables were one of the special goods which had to be stored in a customs warehouse for a month for inspection before they got approvals.

Imported consumables imported from overseas had to fill up at least one container. Furthermore, the conditions at sea meant that the food had to be properly sealed and preserved. Moreover, the port was located in a rather secluded area, so it was also safer.

[Other than the customs warehouse at the port, could there be any better place to seek shelter?]

Therefore, even though Yanping Port was very far, they all continued on this journey willingly. As they were impeded by the long rows of abandoned cars, they could not move any faster. However, without any map and no GPS, they could only forge ahead following the signs on the highway. After walking quietly in the same manner for some time, Lin Sanjiu stopped.

A dark brown hand opened the car door beside the driver's seat belonging to the car in front of Lin Sanjiu. The opened door directly blocked Lin Sanjiu's way forward.

Lin Sanjiu watched expressionlessly as a dried, shriveled duoluozhong came out of the car. She waved her hand, and a mouthpart appeared in her hand, one that was longer than the mouthpart of the duoluozhong in front of her. Even before the duoluozhong could react, its head along with its small mouthpart flew away from Lin Sanjiu.

"I haven't seen such a dry duoluozhong in a long time," she mumbled to herself. "Life must be hard," after she said that, she stepped over the dead body and kicked the door before continuing forward.

Hu Changzai, who watched her from a distance, suddenly approached Hai Tianqing and asked, "Hey, Executive Hai..."

Hai Tianqing consciously moved away from him. "What?"

"Do you think that Xiao Jiu looks much cooler after she has cut her hair short?"

"I have no idea. I am straight," Hai Tianqing replied as he eyed Hu Changzai.

"Uh, that's right..."Hu Changzai nodded in agreement but suddenly realized that there was something wrong with that logic. "Huh? But I am straight too. Executive Hai, you mean..."

Lin Sanjiu, who was leading the group, acted like she didn't hear their conversation at all. They continued for about another two hours until it was near afternoon. The sun gradually became harsher as the sunlight made it hard for them to keep their eyes open. Despite all of them having Heat Resistance Adaptation and Physical Enhancement, all of them could feel the scalding hot air surrounding them. The burning heat, along with the sand dust, irritated their lungs.

After they passed a few intersections, there were fewer cars on the road. As the sun blazed over their heads, the temperature was no longer suitable for them to be walking outside. Just when they were tempted to look for a car to sleep, the road turned to one corner, revealing the entrance to a dark tunnel.

"Let's enter that tunnel to rest. It's cooler there."

They entered the tunnel in a single file. The tunnel was very long, so without the lights, it was as if they were entering the stomach of a mountain. The road ahead of them was dark, and they could only see the light at the end of the tunnel when they turned behind.

Once they entered the tunnel, they realized that there were even fewer cars. The road they were on only led to the seaside, and

when Hyperthermal Hell just descended, almost no one thought of going to the seaside for shelter.

As B.Rabbit was the smallest among them, he needed twice the energy to cover the same distance. Thus, at that point, he was already very exhausted. Before they even walked a few steps, he jumped up on top of a car, like the king of the mountain, and declared, "I will sleep in this car!"

As they had [Versu Poison] in their bodies, all of them slept in individual cars throughout their journey. This was to prevent them from accidentally touching each other. Dying that way would be really quite stupid.

Hai Tianqing chose the largest SUV he could find while Hu Changzai chose a jeep. Lin Sanjiu was the only one who continued walking around. Every now and then, she would bend down and wipe a car window before looking inside.

Even though most of the cars were not locked, not all cars were suitable for sleeping. Most of the owners died in their cars, so the interiors of their cars were filled with the stench of rotten flesh and the smell of iron from their dried blood. The stench from opening one of those cars was sufficient to give a person a headache. Thus, only cars belonging to owners who had abandoned them to escape were a somewhat bearable choice to sleep in.

The few cars which Lin Sanjiu checked were all not suitable. Just when she was feeling a little at a loss as to what she should do, she suddenly noticed a Toyota Land Cruiser with an opened door just some distance in front of her. She was delighted. If the door was open, it meant that the owner had already left. The car was big, so she thought about how she would be able to sleep comfortably inside. She walked a few steps toward the driver seat and opened the door wider. Then, she peeked inside the car.

When she looked inside the car, she saw Zhu Mei smiling at her

— if that could be considered a smile.

Chapter 91: Dying a Second Time

Dying a Second Time

Lin Sanjiu thought carefully about how she even remembered that there was a place like the customs warehouse. Even if most people knew that imported consumables had to pass through customs, Lin Sanjiu knew some details, but she had forgotten who told her about it. For example, she knew that the customs officers would do a sample testing on the goods and this process would last for a month, and that the food items would be stored in a warehouse during this time...

She had forgotten that it was that person until she was staring back at that face again. That was because the person in front of her once worked in a trading company.

"What's wrong, Xiao Jiu?" the voice belonging to the person in the car held a cheerful tone. "Aren't you happy to meet an old friend?"

Lin Sanjiu stared directly at the woman before her, momentarily forgetting what she wanted to say.

"Zhu Mei," Lin Sanjiu finally uttered with her dry, parched voice after a long time.

The others behind her sensed that something was amiss, so they went over to help. When they heard their conversation, they exchanged confused glances with each other.

"I haven't seen you for a while, Xiao Jiu." Zhu Mei narrowed her pair of almond eyes. "I didn't expect that we would have these additional decorations on our faces."

Lin Sanjiu looked at Zhu Mei absent-mindedly as she reached to touch the dark green flowery designs on her face. Zhu Mei laughed when she saw her action. "But yours looks much better."

[Did she just laugh?] This random thought popped up in Lin

Sanjiu's mind. Zhu Mei did sound like she just laughed, but half of that face was already replaced with a mouthpart, so it was really difficult to see if that laughter was genuine.

The area where her mouth and nose were was now a deep cavity which housed a mouthpart covered in thick mucus. Zhu Mei swung her mouthpart to one side, and it hit the car door noisily. This scared Lin Sanjiu and she took one step back, waking her from her dream-like state.

"Could you be afraid of me?" Zhu Mei stepped forward.

Zhu Mei was wearing shorts so Lin Sanjiu could clearly see her leg. It was white and moist, her skin was just as delicate as when she was alive.

[When she was alive?]

"Zhu Mei... I went to your house before the weather got this hot." Lin Sanjiu felt that her throat was so dry that it itched. "There were other people in your apartment, and they told me that you were dead..."

"What do you mean by other people?" Zhu Mei crooked her head, and when she did this, her mouthpart cast a metallic reflection within the dark tunnel. "It doesn't matter. Perhaps, I was dead then... But since you went there, why didn't you give me a proper burial?"

Lin Sanjiu was speechless. At that time, she thought that Luther and Marcie were going to kill her, so she rushed for the stairs, and after they had cleared their misunderstanding, she came face to face with her first duoluo zhong... When she remembered this, she felt a heavy feeling in her chest. She opened her mouth and was just about to say something when she was interrupted by her conversation partner.

"It's alright." Zhu Mei laughed and got out of the car. "If you had really buried me, I might not be alive now."

[Did you changed after you died?] Lin Sanjiu thought quietly as she bit her lower lip.

"If I had known that you'd turn into a duoluozhong, I wouldn't have just left you there," Lin Sanjiu said with a stifled tone.

Zhu Mei raised her brows. "So you have already thought of a term? You think that us, duoluozhong, don't deserve to live? You think that rather than becoming a duoluozhong, I should die?" the tone she used was grating and oppressive, this attitude was one that Lin Sanjiu had never seen coming from the person before her. Lin Sanjiu was truly stumped by her questions. Her mind was in a mess, and she did not know how to reply, so she only looked back blankly.

Hu Changzai rushed over from behind. "Xiao Jiu, do you know this duoluozhong? Come over here, you have to be wary of her..." Lin Sanjiu couldn't hear Hu Changzai properly, it was as if he was very far from her.

Zhu Mei shot a glance at him and laughed acidly. "So it's you now? Where is Ren Nan?"

"He's is one of my companions," Lin Sanjiu replied as calmly as she could, suppressing her emotions.

Just then, Hai Tianqing and B.Rabbit also came over and stared at Zhu Mei. They maintained a large distance between each other to avoid direct contact with each other. Over the past one month, this had already become a subconscious habit.

Zhu Mei seemed unfazed being surrounded by them. She folded her arms and looked at Lin Sanjiu. A sudden silence surrounded them.

Facing Zhu Mei who not only had a different appearance but even a different personality, Lin Sanjiu really didn't know what to say. Should she be happy that her best friend was alive? Should she be depressed that her friend had turned into a duoluozhong?

Should she treat her friend like any other duoluozhong? After witnessing Wang Sisi feeding on her own father and Pei Jun who made use of his girlfriend to hunt... what else was there left to say? What should she even do? Lin Sanjiu was clueless as to what she should do next.

It took a while before Lin Sanjiu finally opened her mouth. Unexpectedly, the first words she blurted out were, "Zhu Mei, did you... did you kill a lot of people?"

She knew that Zhu Mei could only maintain her normal skin and flesh if she had consumed at least over ten people.

"Yes, I have to survive! I've already lived in this tunnel for a couple of months," Zhu Mei nodded, showing no attempts to hide this fact. "At least half of the people here, including the Posthumans, became my nourishment. As I told you about the details regarding the customs, I thought you would come here, so I waited... Lo and behold, I've really met you.

"I still have all my past memories, and I can still speak. I can still think... Xiao Jiu, do you know what this means? This means that Zhu Mei never died, and we're still good friends."

Both of them were now standing in front of each other. While Zhu Mei spoke, she shook her mouthpart, so her saliva was now slowly dripping to the ground.

[Is this true?]

Hai Tianqing was standing to the left of Lin Sanjiu, where they could see the entrance where they came from. He took one step forward anxiously as he frowned and urged, "Xiao Jiu, don't talk to her anymore. Once they've become duoluozhongs, they are no longer who they previously were. They all deserve to—"

Before he finished his sentence, he was stunned and forgot what he wanted to say. He was not the only one, Lin Sanjiu and Zhu Mei were also shocked. They slowly watched as a man approached

them.

The young man was about 1.78m. He wore a beret, carried a backpack, and was humming a little tune as he walked between Lin Sanjiu and Zhu Mei nonchalantly. Acting as if he didn't see them, he walked forward with a light march.

"Where... where did he come from?" Lin Sanjiu stammered as she looked to her left. She saw that Hu Changzai, Hai Tianqing, and B.Rabbit were still standing in their original positions. The man, apparently came from her left, so he had to walk past Hai Tianqing and the others — yet, they were equally shocked. They were stunned as they watched the silhouette of the man walking away. Clearly, they had just noticed the man.

"I... I don't know. He just walked past..." Hu Changzai gaped. "I didn't even notice that there was someone nearby..."

The man stopped as if he felt the stares behind him. At the same time, he stopped humming and turned to look behind. The shadow from his beret blocked half his face so they could only see the faint smile on his moist lips. It was a smile of courtesy.

"Did you just say that you lived here for a few months?" the man asked monotonously, without any pause or inflection. His robotic voice made everyone feel uncomfortable. His question was obviously directed to Zhu Mei leading Lin Sanjiu to instinctively look at her.

Zhu Mei frowned, carefully observing the man as if she hadn't anticipated that the weirdo would speak to her. Shortly after, her face turned pale as her mouthpart trembled slightly: "Ah... You're that—"

The next second, an oval hole appeared in her chest like magic. Through that hole, Lin Sanjiu could see the cars behind Zhu Mei. Zhu Mei lowered her head in disbelief, staring at the hole in her chest. She murmured something before she fell to the ground with a "thump". Her eyes were still wide opened.

It was only at that moment that the piece of flesh, expelled from her body, hit the wall of the tunnel. It dyed the wall red as it slid down. The Beret Man slowly placed his arm down. The gun-barrel like thing in his hand was still spouting smoke. "When a person becomes a duoluozhong, they only regain the dark sides of their personality, so they are no longer the same person. Since she was a duoluozhong, I killed her for you. You don't have to thank me," he said in the same bland, monotonous voice, the corner of his lips were still curled.

Beret Man lifted his face up slightly when he spoke. This allowed the others to see his entire face. He appeared to be of mixed-race. His skin was smooth, he had a high nose bridge, and they could see wisps of curly hair under his beret. He would be considered rather handsome if only his eyeballs showed some sign of movement within his two eyes sockets. Instead, his pair of eyes looked soulless.

"Zhu Mei!" Lin Sanjiu held Zhu Mei's dead body, which had a hole in the middle. She did not dare to look at her face but instead tried to control her trembling hands and legs. "You... you killed Zhu Mei?"

For a moment, her mind was clouded with this single thought. Unknowingly, she glared at Beret Man as her eyes started to turn red. She suddenly felt a heavy, large hand on her shoulder and felt that the person exerted some strength to hold her back. Hai Tianqing carefully avoided her skin while he did this, then he said with a deep voice, "Xiao Jiu, you shouldn't act impulsively."

Lin Sanjiu looked down and saw that she had unconsciously armed herself with her mouthpart weapon.

"Calm down. You have to calm down," Hai Tianqing who was usually collected and dependable sounded different from his usual self, "Look behind you."

Lin Sanjiu looked behind, feeling a little puzzled. Over ten men

were standing behind Hu Changzai and B.Rabbit, and they each looked exactly like Beret Man. Their eyes were hollow and devoid of emotion as they all pointed their gun barrels at Lin Sanjiu and her companions.

"Are you heading to the customs warehouse? Let's go together," the man who had just killed Zhu Mei said with a flat tone.

Chapter 92: Did Mr. Dot Deceive us?

There was a deadly silence on the highway. There were no birds chirping in the air and no sounds of vehicles coursing through, only an occasional breeze of the wind that acted like an invisible hand which swayed the car doors that were not properly closed. The unforgiving sun blazed down from above as if hell was bent on roasting any living being which dared brave its rays, raising the temperatures to a deadly level.

The sound of shuffling footsteps traveled out from a nearby dark, gloomy tunnel as a group of people walked toward the exit. A young man wearing a beret was leading the group. His red lips curled as he smiled happily. He had a lithe figure, long slim limbs, and a skinny waist. Even though he didn't look masculine enough, he looked nimble, but oddly, he had an awkward gait when he walked.

Lin Sanjiu and the others followed behind him like convicts, while escorted by over ten men who looked exactly like the Beret Man. Even though their hands were not tied, none of them had the intention to use violence as they had witnessed the prowess of the weapons those men possessed. Instead, Lin Sanjiu's group just followed obediently.

"Why are you heading to the customs warehouse?" Beret Man suddenly asked without turning behind, but Lin Sanjiu did not want to talk to him at all.

"That's because there is a possibility that we'll find a lot of imported foods stored there... There weren't any edible food in the city, and we haven't eaten for two days," Hu Changzai replied.

"Oh," Beret Man answered curtly and did not say another word.

"Can we rest for a while and continue at night? It is very dangerous to continue our journey under the sun," Hu Changzai asked cautiously after gathering some courage.

"It's alright. We're not afraid of that."

Hu Changzai was shocked by that reply and gave Lin Sanjiu a pleading look. Then, he walked closer to her and whispered, "Xiao Jiu, don't you find the way they walk a little... weird?"

Actually, "weird" was an understatement.

Never in her life had Lin Sanjiu seen any person walking like that. They tiptoed with their heels high in the air as they walked and moved their unilateral arms and legs at the same time. On top of that, the weirdest part of it was that they did not move their joints when they walked, choosing to stretch out and pull back their legs stiffly. It made them look abnormally rigid, and one couldn't help wondering how they could still keep their balance. To deepen that mystery, from the way that Beret Man had shot and killed Zhu Mei, they were clearly able to move their joints...

The moment she thought of Zhu Mei, it casted a shadow on her heart, and she couldn't help feeling sad.

Under the scorching sun, the Beret Men did not fall. On the contrary, they walked even faster. After walking at a quick, steady speed for three hours, Lin Sanjiu and her companions could no longer endure the torture much longer. Starving for two days, then forced by these weird men to walk under the sun for such a long distance, B.Rabbit was the first to throw a tantrum. He sat down on the floor with his bum and shouted, "I'm too tired! I can't walk anymore. I'm not taking another step. You can just kill me however you like. Quick!"

Even though he sounded ready to die, his posture told a different story. His four paws were grounded, and the fur on his back stood up straight. He had obviously prepared himself to jump out of danger at any time. The Beret Mens behind him did not expect that he would suddenly stop and refuse to walk, so a few of them nearly fell. Just when Lin Sanjiu could nearly feel cold sweat appearing on her forehead, one of the Beret Men put down his gun barrel and

grabbed B.Rabbit. It carried the rabbit and continued moving forward.

Under the sunlight, the pink little carrot symbols on B.Rabbit's body could clearly be seen. That pattern on his fur was the result of the [Versu Poison] he had consumed. The three humans and one rabbit looked at each other with astonishment.

"Sh*t!"

If the person carrying B.Rabbit dies, the others would definitely view that as a sign of resistance. If they really had to fight, who could tell what would happen to their tired and weak team?

[Versu Poison] acts very quickly. A person would bleed to death six seconds after he or she had direct skin contact with a carrier. Even if B.Rabbit jumped away from his grip now, it was too late.

"Huh?" Hu Changzai made a soft, surprised sound after walking another two steps. "Why... why is that person alright?"

It was already more than six seconds, yet nothing happened to the man holding the rabbit, and he was still walking briskly.

B.Rabbit froze for a moment, looking at his companions. He pulled down one of his ears a little gloomily and pressed the gold earring on his ear. "Were we deceived by Mr. Dot?" he whispered.

[Goth Outfit: Black Gold Earring]

"Description: As one of the items of the Goth Outfit set, this item has the ability to transmit a user's message directly to his targets. When the user presses down on this earring, they can transmit what they think directly into a target's ears so that others will not overhear their message. This is a perfect item for sending sweet talk, gossiping, cheating during exams... etc. The only requirement is that the target must have touched the earring at least once before, and they must be within 500 meters."

[Gothic Outfit] was one of the special items they had won from the pocket dimension. When they first got out of the pocket

dimension, all of them had already touched that earring once, and it came in handy today.

When they heard what B.Rabbit said, the rest of them started feeling a little uncertain. The past one month had been peaceful, so they did not need to test the effects of the [Versu Poison] on another person.

"I doubt so..." Lin Sanjiu replied without much confidence. She spoke softly because she did not have an item like that earring. "Maybe because your skin is covered by your fur, so it doesn't count as direct contact?"

"Maybe," Hai Tianqing quipped, joining the conversation. "If you expose your skin, the person would have been poisoned long ago."

"But I can't just suddenly shave my fur, right!" B.Rabbit retorted unhappily, "And look, my fur is so beautiful! A bald patch would be so ugly!"

Lin Sanjiu looked at the Beret Man walking in front of her. His back was extremely straight, and he seemed completely ignorant about their conversation. She exchanged a suspicious glance with her companions before she hurried forward and called out, "Hey..."

As she said that, she touched a part of the man's arm which was not covered by his short-sleeved shirt. She did this, trying to make her action look as casual as possible, and even though it was just a short second, Lin Sanjiu got goosebumps all over her body. As she was afraid that the Beret Man would be unhappy and suddenly turn on her with his gun, she tensed up all her muscles preparing to dodge at any time. Instead, she managed to touch his skin unhindered.

It was cold, a little hard, and very smooth.

"Don't touch me/What do you want." Beret Man still did not turn to look behind.

From what it seems, apart from duoluozhongs, the Beret Mens

didn't kill indiscriminately. Lin Sanjiu let out a sigh of relief as she quietly counted the passing seconds. Six seconds passed in a blink of an eye. Beret Man questioned her again: "What do you want/Why aren't you speaking?"

As his voice was like an electronic drone, she could not tell if he was impatient. Lin Sanjiu was only certain that the man was not affected by the effects of [Versu Poison]. Shortly after, she heard B.Rabbit's voice in her ears: "See, it's not my damn fur problem!"

Beret Man slowly turned his head, probably because he did not receive a reply. "Speak," he said with a blank look, his eyes were still motionlessly centered in its socket.

[If I don't say something now, I might get in trouble.] Lin Sanjiu quickly searched for a topic, "Well, what do you want us to do?"

"You'll know when we get there," he gave the same reply.

Lin Sanjiu pressed on, "We are exhausted. No matter what your purpose is, you would need us alive, right? If we continue like this, we all won't last much longer. Could you please let us rest and continue the journey at night?"

Even though she did exaggerate a little, she did not expect Beret Man's reaction after it kept quiet for a few seconds. It stopped and replied monotonously, "Okay, you can rest here until night time but don't try to escape."

All of them were relieved when they heard his answer.

The other Beret Men also stopped when they heard him and surrounded their captives. Even though [Versu Poison] seemed useless against the Beret Men, no one in their group could figure out if Mr. Dot really lied, so they chose to sleep in individual cars.

The Beret Men did not show any sign that they wanted to rest in any of the cars. They stood pencil straight, without even moving an inch. The weird thing was that they continued tiptoeing while they stood guard.

[Isn't it tiring?] Lin Sanjiu thought to herself curiously as she swept a glance at their feet.

Having nothing to eat and drink for two days and experiencing a roller-coaster of emotions that day, Lin Sanjiu felt her weariness once she sat in the car. The customs warehouse was not far now. When she thought about the plans for those weirdos, her chest tightened. The trauma of Zhu Mei's death also weighed heavily on her heart like a huge boulder, making it difficult for her to breathe.

When she noticed that the coast seemed clear, Lin Sanjiu secretly took out a white cloth doll. The cloth doll was very simple. Its head was created by stuffing some cotton in a white cloth and then tying that bun with a string. Its face was drawn on, and its body was just the remaining ends of the cloth. Lin Sanjiu slapped the cloth doll on the interior roof of the car, and it immediately hung itself. Though it swayed in mid-air, it always faced the windows of the car.

[\[Teru Teru Bozu Defense System\]](#)

"Description: This item can only be used in a space where there is a 'roof'. When you hang this on your roof or ceiling, the Teru Teru Bozu will automatically activate its defense system and track the source of any potential danger. It will sound an alarm when an enemy comes within 30 meters. This is energy saving, super-sensitive, and comes with an authentic human voice. One AAA battery can power this item for 500 hours. This is a new product from Seahorse Babies Toy Inc."

This was another item that they had won from the pocket dimension. Even though it was a toy, it was surprisingly useful.

When she looked at the motionless Beret Men under the sun, Lin Sanjiu could no longer tell which was the one who had killed Zhu Mei. Her tensed mind slowly relaxed as her consciousness faded into darkness. She slowly closed her eyes, and an orange background overtook her vision as the sunlight passed through her

eyelids. As she looked at the orange shadow, she fell asleep with a heart full of sorrow and worries.

Teru teru bōzu are a type of japanese dolls. If they are upright, they will bring good weather. If they are upside down, they will bring rain. You can search for the term in wiki for more information.

Chapter 93: The Earth Which Passed Away and Frozen

[What a breathtaking view...] Lin Sanjiu unwittingly slowed down her footsteps as she took in the panorama of the devastation which laid in the distance. [No, that's not right. The word 'breathtaking' isn't too appropriate to describe this scene. How should I put this? Looking at this makes one feel so insignificant...]

If someone were to look down from the sky, they would see that the entire Shenghai Port and its surrounding district were in a half-melted state. The electrical poles fell in all directions, crashing down on multiple roofs. Buildings had either collapsed or were leaning dangerously... yet those things were merely the backdrop of the composition. The thing which caught their attention the most was the streets, which were strewn with wreckages of boats of all sizes, and that fishy, pungent stench, which lunged at them. This twisted masterpiece, created by the apocalypse, overwhelmed all of their five senses.

A considerably intact fishing vessel had crashed right in the middle of a residential estate and bulldozed a row of shops. The hull of a tour yacht jutted out from a damaged car while the other half of the yacht laid on the ground, overturned. Lin Sanjiu could not help feeling disconcerted as she walked beneath the hull of a large steel ocean liner with her companions by her side.

"What... do you think happened?" Lin Sanjiu asked. It was almost impossible for them to make out the original form of the streets.

Feeling emotional, Hu Changzai reached to push his spectacles out of habit but missed. He forgot that after he had developed the physical enhancement passive ability, he had already thrown away his spectacles. "The rising temperature must have melted all the glaciers, causing the sea level to rise rapidly, and the ocean came through this area. Look at that ocean liner, it should be at least a

few thousand tons. The waves must have brought it over from the open sea..."

"How strong must the waves be for such a massive ocean liner to be washed ashore?" Hai Tianqing ask incredulously, "How is it possible that such a large wave didn't reach the city?"

"Looking at the destruction, you shouldn't call it a wave, it should have been a tsunami..." Hu Changzai seemed to have forgotten the Beret Men with guns standing behind them as he slowed down his footsteps and carefully observed his surroundings. He took a breath before he continued, "Despite its magnitude, it would eventually die down. On top of that, the high temperature must have quickly evaporated most of the water."

That was a logical speculation, and it also explained the lack of survivors nearby. When Lin Sanjiu walked past a dead, unidentified, human-sized fish, her nostrils were assailed by the nauseating, unique stench of dried, rotten flesh. "I hope the customs warehouse isn't totally destroyed," she commented dispiritedly as she moved away from the carcass.

Everyone inhaled sharply as they frowned and kept quiet.

All along, the Beret Men showed no reaction to the devastation brought about by the apocalypse. However, when they heard about the possibility that the customs warehouse could be destroyed, one of them suddenly spoke. From his voice, it was the man who had killed Zhu Mei: "It would be terrible if it was destroyed/Food is important/Move quickly/All of you."

He did not look worried at all albeit his words. His red lips were still curled, and he was displaying a happy and polite smile. His eyes were still as lifeless, but they were curved in an amicable manner.

[Do they need to eat?] When such a thought suddenly surfaced in Lin Sanjiu's mind, she was surprised by herself. [Of course, humans need to eat.]

"Look at them, do you think they are alive? Do you think they are humans?" she turned and whispered to Hu Changzai, not quite knowing why she felt that way.

"What do you mean?" Hu Changzai hesitated for a moment and pulled his gaze away from the ocean liner's wreckage. "Their movements are quite weird, but how could they not be humans?"

"Doesn't a normal living person need to eat, drink, and rest? Shouldn't they be tired after walking for such a long time?" Lin Sanjiu refuted, "Shouldn't a normal living person have movable joints—"

She couldn't finish her sentence because of the Beret Man who was directly in front. He violently turned his head 180° and stared at her.

Meanwhile, he continued walking with his body facing forward.

"Were you talking about me just now."

The faces of the three humans and one rabbit instantly turned pale.

"No, no... It's nothing. We were discussing the customs warehouse," Lin Sanjiu stammered after she took quite some time to control her fear.

"Oh," that Beret Man replied before he swung his head back to its normal position. His neck showed no evidence that he had just rotated his head 180°, and he did not break his neck with that freakish maneuver. "That's right/Move quickly."

"His sense of hearing isn't that good," B.Rabbit's voice rang out in her ear — his judgment was based on a comparison with the other Posthumans.

Even so, they did not dare to say anything carelessly. Lin Sanjiu calmed her nerves as she walked quickly with the rest in silence as the Beret Men surrounded them. Without any road signs leading the way, they continued forward with only their instinctive sense

of direction, and after taking many wrong turns, they finally reached the port of customs when the sun was shining brightly above them. Or perhaps, the more accurate term to use was the remnants of the port of customs.

The customs checkpoint had totally disappeared as it was very close to the wharf. Due to the tsunami, the roofs of the multiple rows of warehouses had also been smashed beyond recognition. From afar, it was just one giant big mess. The usually neatly stacked shipping containers were scattered everywhere, adding to the disorder. Some of them were damaged, but most were still intact. This gave Lin Sanjiu and her companions a glimmer of hope.

As they continued walking, no one could utter a word. There was little trace of that once busy port.

Even the ocean had disappeared.

Perhaps, the ocean remained, somewhere far beyond their peripheral view; however, right now as they looked past the wharf, they could only see a shallow layer of muddy seawater over a vast exposed land of sand, shimmering under the sun. The deep seabed, which had remained hidden underwater for millions of years, now revealed itself blatantly, just like a man lying at Death's door accepting his unavoidable fate, as the sun slowly sucked away its moisture. There was no longer the smell of fresh ocean breeze. Instead, the air was filled with the nauseating stench coming from the countless rotting carcass of dead sea creatures which littered the continental shelf as they soaked in a fishy brine.

Lin Sanjiu stood still as she stared at the "sea" for quite a long time.

After a while, she touched her face and realized that her tears just fell. Despite living in a post-apocalyptic metropolis, Lin Sanjiu struggled on, trying her best to survive. Yet, as she looked at this place where the ocean once was, a wave of sorrow welled up in her.

She simply couldn't control the urge to cry.

[With Nature defeated, perhaps there really isn't a second chance for humans.]

"I think we should look for supplies," Hai Tianqing's baritone voice broke the silence.

His words reminded everyone about their primary purpose of coming here. They all looked at the Beret Man leading them. Still tiptoeing, his eyes were facing the large dried-up ocean. "The four of you should spread out and search for food and water then gather them here/Don't try to escape/You'll all be escorted," the leading Beret Man smiled and said.

"It's so suffocating to hear him speak," B.Rabbit grumbled to himself once Beret Man gave his instructions. Right after that, tottering footsteps sounded behind B.Rabbit as two Beret Man followed him closely like a shadow.

The companions looked at each other before splitting up to check out the warehouses and the shipping containers; not forgetting to bring their unwanted lackeys. Lin Sanjiu walked toward the red shipping container which was nearest to her. Hearing the footsteps of the Beret Man following her, she turned and asked, "What is your name?"

With a smile still plastered on his face, he pointed his gun barrel at her without replying.

"Why are you all wearing the same clothes? Are you all from the same organization?" Lin Sanjiu said trying to sound casual.

The Beret Man did not reply. He continued following her, tiptoeing.

No matter how useless it seemed, Lin Sanjiu continued asking him many non-invasive questions as if trying to hold a normal everyday conversation. However, he did not say a single word, leaving her at her wit's end. While she continued her monologue,

they reached the shipping container. From its size, it was about 20 to 30 tons and was completely overturned. It was askew and on top of some rubble. The unsightly remains of a human arm jutted out from the rubble; it had decomposed to a point where one had to use their imagination to even recognize what it was.

Luckily, the shipping container was not buried in the rubble, so all they had to do was to pry open its doors to find out its contents. Lin Sanjiu did not want to draw out her mouthpart weapon in front of the Beret Man so she turned to him and said, "The lock is too heavy, I can't open this. Can you blast open the door with your gun?"

The Beret Man gave her a murmur of assent and raised his arm. He directed his gun barrel at the shipping container. Then, without a sound or any bullet, a blast of air struck the door and created an oval hole. The fearsome blast of air should have been invisible, yet the magnitude of its power gave Lin Sanjiu the illusion that she could see it with her bare eyes.

The doors of the shipping container groaned as they were pulled open. Lin Sanjiu felt slightly excited when she saw the stack of wooden crates inside. While she silently prayed that the crates were not filled with useless crap like computer components, she broke the bindings securing the crates. The large crates at the top slid down and crashed on the floor, nearby hitting the Beret Man below.

"I'm sorry. I didn't expect that." Lin Sanjiu smiled at him without looking apologetic.

The Beret Man did not respond — his smile seemed to be painted on his face. His lips did not even move the slightest bit despite barely escaping getting crushed. Lin Sanjiu chose one of the crates and mustered her strength. She punched one side of the crate, and the wooden surface broke into pieces. She pulled away the bits of wood and reached inside the crate, feeling hopeful. Then, she pulled out few smaller boxes. "Are this... toys?" Lin Sanjiu tore

through a few more layers of packaging before she touched something. "These are toy figurines from Disney's Frozen?"

The imported toys in their genuine packaging were clearly very well-made. The materials used for the toy's skin, its clothes, and its hair were all meticulously chosen. The quality of the dolls was comparable to that of Mattel's Barbie dolls. Sadly, no matter how beautiful they were, they were useless. Lin Sanjiu sighed and felt as if her stomach was as disappointed as she was.

Unexpectedly, the Beret Man suddenly moved. He turned to look at the dolls in the crate and shouted out to the others in the distance, "I need three people here/Don't let anyone near these crates."

If his voice could express emotions, Lin Sanjiu guessed that it would be one of excitement and urgency. When she thought of this, she secretly brushed her hand over the boxes in the crate when the Beret Man turned his head away. A few boxes disappeared from the crate.

She stored three boxes containing a 60cm Elsa each into cards and kept the cards in her body.

[Why would they attach such importance to a crate of toys?] For now, she didn't know the answer to that question but being proactive never hurt anyone.

After that, the Beret Men chased Lin Sanjiu away from the crates, treating her like a goat. As she had not completed her task, she continued opening other shipping containers, trying to look for edible supplies.

Unfortunately, she wasn't very lucky. After opening three containers, there was still no food in sight, and she even nearly hurt herself. The last container she opened was actually filled with imported cars. Due to the angle of the container, she was nearly crushed by the few cars which rolled out when she opened the door.

"That was some quick karmic retribution!" Lin Sanjiu mumbled as she stretched her aching back. Just as she decided to continue walking, she heard B.Rabbit shouting excitedly: "Coffee! I've found coffee!"

Chapter 94: Isn't That Body Figure a Little too Perfect?

After they searched through a dozen shipping containers, their group finally had some results. They found a small size shipping container filled with canned Starbucks coffee and another filled with Swiss chocolates. Though it wasn't a staple food, it was still a pleasant surprise for Lin Sanjiu and the others whose basic requirement for food was just calories.

The crates filled with coffee and chocolate were dragged out and stacked properly by the Beret Men. They actually took up quite a large area. Lin Sanjiu leaned on a few crates and drank a few large mouthfuls of warm coffee before she let out a sigh as she felt her dehydrated body being revitalized.

"This is too sweet." B.Rabbit puckered his furry face as he licked some chocolate, unwillingly. "My previous owner once said that rabbits should not eat sweet things."

The chocolate had long melted under the heat, but they did not go bad and seemed edible. The only problem was that they all had to be careful when they were eating them. Once they removed the paper packaging, they had to quickly collect the chocolate goo with their mouths, so that it doesn't drip all over their hands.

In contrast, Hu Changzai was beaming. He opened his fifth packet of chocolate and poured the melted chocolate into his mouth, commenting, "Wow. I've eaten this brand of chocolate once, but it was too expensive, so I couldn't bring myself to buy it... sigh... It still tastes so good even if it is in this melted form."

Hai Tianqing gave him a sidelong glance before opening a can of coffee.

About ten Beret Men were surrounding the four of them in a circle. Surrounded by a group of people with the same smiles, Lin

Sanjiu wondered how Hu Changzai and B.Rabbit still had the mood to eat — she gave them an expression of not knowing whether to laugh or cry.

"Huh?" she muttered as her eyes paused on what she noticed.

"What's wrong?" Hai Tianqing was keen about such things despite his size.

"Look over there." Everyone turned to where she pointed, somewhere in the distance. "Do you see people there?"

Somewhere in the far distance, they saw a row of little black dots moving. If it hadn't been for their enhanced eyesight, they wouldn't have been able to spot those people.

"I think so..." B.Rabbit squinted while he wiped off the chocolate on his fur. "There seem to be quite a few people, at least ten, I suppose," he murmured.

[Are they survivors? Did they come to the customs also hoping to look for food? If it was so, perhaps we could seek help from them and get away from these Beret Men—] Her raised hopes were quickly erased by the Beret Man leader: "Some of you should go over and see if they're heading this way."

With that, five other Beret Men turned and left. The three humans and one rabbit exchanged glances as their faces turned somber.

[It's stressful enough that these ten Beret Men are following us. If more of their colleagues come over, the possibility of escaping would become slimmer...] B.Rabbit thought about it, and his eyes flashed with determination. He pressed his earrings and said, "With some of them guarding the crates, and some others checking out that commotion, there are only four of them here now. If we fight them one-on-one, we might have a chance of winning..."

"No. Those guarding the crates are nearby, they will quickly notice if something is amiss," Hai Tianqing replied quietly, "if they

turn on us, I don't have the confidence to dodge an attack from that weapon."

"And if those people over there really belong to their group, we might find ourselves between a rock and a hard place," Lin Sanjiu added, feeling that the plan was too risky.

B.Rabbit sighed when he heard their replies, he lowered his head and continued licking his chocolate miserably.

The group of people they saw in the distance moved very quickly. It only took them a little time to reach the place where Lin Sanjiu and her companions were. The four of them looked up at the same time observing the people who were approaching.

Lin Sanjiu had never seen women with such perfect figures. She concluded that it was probably because they were of mixed-ancestry just like the Beret Men. The woman leading the troupe had a round, small head and a classic oval face. Her neck was long, and her hourglass figure with her slender limbs made her appear graceful and light-footed. Lin Sanjiu had seen many models in her life, but the proportion and body frame of the woman seemed as though she was exquisitely-crafted, the contours of her body flowed so perfectly that she couldn't spot a single flaw. This was enough to make any woman feel inferior.

The amazing thing was that it was not only one woman that had this perfect figure. Just like how the Beret Men had captured them, the leading woman and a dozen of women with the same perfect figures were surrounding five Posthumans of varied looks and stature.

All the women wore blue wigs, carried the same weapon that the Beret Men had, and they were all pointing their weapons at the five people surrounded by them.

When a teenager — about fifteen or sixteen in school uniform — saw Lin Sanjiu and her companions, he asked woefully, "What do you want from us? Why did you catch us here?"

Lin Sanjiu was stunned for a moment before she suddenly realized that the teenager must have mistaken them for the hidden masterminds when he saw them sitting on the ground casually eating and drinking.

"We are also captives... Huh?" Lin Sanjiu was surprised when she saw the Posthuman at the back of the group. "Tie Dao? You managed to escape?"

When Lin Sanjiu said that, Hai Tianqing, Hu Changzai, and B.Rabbit turned to look at him at the same time. Tie Dao shot Lin Sanjiu a glare and turned pale instantly. He turned to the other, nodding in acknowledgment and forced a smile, "Hi... hi. Are you fine?"

B.Rabbit scoffed as if a bit of that arrogance he had as an Executive in Oasis returned, "I'm NOT fine. I don't like being watched by those people, and I don't know what they want!"

The Blue-Haired Women shoved the five new people and forced them to sit down with Lin Sanjiu's group.

"Executive Rab... Rabbit... You're here too..." Tie Dao nodded repetitively at B.Rabbit even though they were sitting some distance apart.

Lin Sanjiu looked at him, feeling a little bewildered by his behavior before she turned to the uniformed teenager and asked, "Where did you meet those women? What happened?"

The uniformed teenager replied with a sobbing tone, "I met these people on the road. Before we knew it, these women pointed guns at us and made us follow them. My camp isn't far, but I'm worried about my sister, she's all alone..."

Lin Sanjiu's heart skipped a beat, but she couldn't cover his mouth fast enough. One of the Blue-Haired Women immediately bent down and looked at him expressionlessly. She placed her gun to the teenager's head and said, "Where is your sister?/Lead us to

her," she spoke in the same tone as the Beret Men, without any inflection.

The uniformed teenager's face turned white, looking as if he wanted to slap himself for saying that. He motioned his mouth meaninglessly for a while before he finally succumbed to his fear of death. He forced himself to stand, and the Blue-Haired Woman pushed him toward a Beret Man. Shortly after, the latter escorted the teenager away.

Lin Sanjiu also noticed then that the women walked tiptoeing.

[Why are they walking like that? Is this some kind of black magic?]

Just then, the Beret Man leader pulled out a small black cube from his ear. He pressed it, and a small mic popped out, then he said softly, "Yes/We already reached Shenghai Port/We have nine people with us."

The eight people on the floor looked at him dumbfounded.

"Yes/There are many shipping containers here." The Beret Man smiled and continued, "Roger that/When will they arrive?/Okay."

As he spoke without any pauses, Lin Sanjiu, who had been holding her breath as she eavesdropped, only realized that he had finished his conversation when she saw him keeping the cube.

[Are there more people coming?] Lin Sanjiu looked worriedly at her companions, feeling very uncertain about the situation. [How many of those Beret Men and Blue-Haired Women weirdos are there? If this goes on, can we still escape?]

"I want all of you to empty those shipping containers now/You will stay there during the day," the Beret Man commanded the people on the ground with a flat tone.

"They made us look for food and water. Now, they're asking us to repurpose those shipping containers..." Lin Sanjiu grumbled softly to Hai Tianqing as she stood up with the others, "Do you think they

plan to lock us up like prisoners?"

"It's possible. But I don't know what's their big plan?" Hai Tianqing frowned slightly.

As the people behind them were all Posthumans, all of them heard their conversation clearly even though they were whispering. A middle-aged white collar worker coughed and eyed the both of them.

When they were approaching the doors of a shipping container, the middle-aged white collar worker suddenly leaped up. Then, he kicked the calf of one of the Blue-Haired Women. Caught off-guard, the woman fell face up as her balance was very poor. Her blue wig fell off her hair and reveal her bald head. The middle-aged white collar worker grabbed her gun and immediately shouted, "Activate [Vajra Body Defense](#)!"

That seemed to be his ability. After he said that, his body emitted a golden glow, and the middle-aged white collar worker started running away like a maniac.

No one had expected that someone would actually do that. One of the smiling Beret Men immediately chased after him. The Beret Man fired his weapon a few time but somehow, due to either his target's dodging skills or because his target's ability truly made him impervious to the attacks, his target, the middle-aged white collar worker, continued sprinting forward. The Beret Man chased closely behind, and the two figures soon disappeared out of sight.

The Posthumans who just entered the shipping container was roused by this, but they all kept quiet when they looked behind. A dozen Blue-haired Women were standing at the door, pointing their weapons at them.

"F*ck!" Tie Dao cursed as he kicked one of the wooden crates to vent his anger.

All of them could only accept their situation. They started

emptying the shipping containers around. The seven of them could not even fill up half a container, yet the weirdos forced them to empty more than ten shipping containers which contained at least 20 tons of goods each. Not only did they have to carry the goods out from the container, but they had to continue searching for food and water and also move the empty shipping containers to flat ground...

After hours of such backbreaking labor, none of the Posthumans could endure any longer, no matter how strong they were. When it reached noon, the hottest time of the day, all the Posthumans laid on the floor of a container; they were all so exhausted that they could not even lift a finger.

Lin Sanjiu laid on the floor. Her whole body was aching. When she turned and saw the rest of the Posthumans lying on the floor looked like her, pale from exhaustion, she couldn't help feeling disheartened.

[Did they make us empty these containers so they could house more 'prisoners'?] she wondered. Suddenly, she heard someone approaching. She forced herself up so that she could look outside and found out that it was the Beret Man who had chased after the middle-aged white collar worker.

The only reason why she could identify that Beret Man was because he was grabbing the white collar worker. The captive's limbs were horrendously deformed as if they had been twisted many times. The injured man's eyes were shut tightly, and his face had a sickly yellow tint.

"Is he still alive?" a Blue-Haired Woman asked.

"I only broke the bones in his arms and legs into four segments each/He is totally paralyzed but he is still breathing/He should be alive," the Beret Man replied monotonously.

Following which, the middle-aged white collar worker was thrown into the shipping container. His body drew an arc in the

air as his broken limbs flailed loosely before he landed on the floor.

The term used here is very close to 金剛不壞體神功, I just adapted the standard translation to fit the context. In wuxia, when a person masters this skill, their body will become impenetrable.

Chapter 95: The Truth Behind the Beret Men

Lin Sanjiu placed her hand on her chest, trying to calm her violently thumping heart. Next, she rocked Hai Tianqing a few times, carefully avoiding his skin. The latter opened his eyes, hazily. After spending the entire morning working together with his companions to empty ten tons of goods, even someone as strong as Hai Tianqing had long fallen asleep due to exhaustion.

"Huh? What's wrong?" he asked quietly as he rubbed his tired eyes.

Under the dim lighting in the container, he could see Lin Sanjiu's amber cat-like eyes shining.

"I know what those Beret Men are," her voice was a little shaky when she said this.

Hai Tianqing sat up immediately. At that moment, there were already close to 100 posthumans in the container...

—

Throughout the short morning, they constantly heard footsteps outside the shipping container, and each time the door opened, a few people with panicked faces would be pushed into the container by the Beret Men, becoming the new members in this group of prisoners. As the number of people grew, the prisoners couldn't help feeling anxious.

[What are those Beret Men and their colleague planning, why would they need to capture so many people?] this was the thought that bothered them.

When the container was almost full, one of the Beret Man slammed the door shut. He secured the door with a metal chain and locked it from the outside. Considering that the prisoners were all Posthumans, the metal chain was just for display. The thing which the "prisoners" feared were what they could see through the

gaps in the container: the Beret Men with their weapons. The middle-aged white collar worker with broken limbs serving as a clear warning to all, so the newcomers did not dare to act recklessly. For them to survive till today, all of them must have gone through some life-threatening experiences. Seeing that the weird people did not have the intention to kill, all of them decided to rest to preserve their stamina after a short discussion.

As Lin Sanjiu and her companions were still wary of the [Versu Poison] in their bodies, they sat far apart. Worried that she might accidentally come in contact with someone when she was asleep, Lin Sanjiu chose to rest at a space near the door where there was no one. The sunlight seeped through a gap in the door and cast its rays on her, it was uncomfortably warm and bright thus no one wanted to go near that space.

After she slept drowsily for a while, she suddenly heard footsteps outside. They sounded different from what they heard in the morning. The rustling footsteps sounded like troops of people, probably with small statures, approaching from a distance. Their feets had to be very small as they sounded like a colony of giant rats, scurrying.

Lin Sanjiu struggled for a few minutes to force her eyes open, and when she peeped through the gap in the door, she was shocked.

Then, she rushed over to Hai Tianqing to wake him up.

—

"Wake Hu Changzai, I'll wake B.Rabbit. We will meet at the door." Lin Sanjiu ordered without explaining herself properly. She carefully avoided the disorderly groups of people lying on the ground and ran to where B.Rabbit was. Hai Tianqing got up and woke Hu Changzai before they all met at the door as agreed.

There was a spot of light where Lin Sanjiu previously slept. Hu Changzai walked into this spot of sunlight, he bent and peeped out of the gap. As the group approaching them was very large, there

were still "people" trailing behind. The four of them watched the scene unfolding before them.

They saw a group of very short women whose heights didn't even reach a meter. Their heads were disproportionately large compared to their bodies, and they also appeared to be of mixed-heritage. They all had pale blonde hair, blue eyes, and were beautiful in an unfathomable way. B.Rabbit wiggled his ears and looked at Lin Sanjiu with a puzzled face. "Aren't these just a group of dwarves from overseas? What does this have to do with what those Beret Men are?"

Lin Sanjiu gave him a wry smile, while something suddenly appeared in her hand. "Look at this, then look outside."

A motionless 60cm toy Elsa, in a see-through box, stared back at them with a smile.

Her three companions were stunned. They looked at the toy and then at the "dwarves" walking outside.

"This, this... They look exactly like this," Hu Changzai stuttered, "You mean they're—"

"That's right." Lin Sanjiu nodded. "I found a crate filled with dolls just now. When the Beret Men discovered this, they immediately guarded the crate and did not let anyone near the crate. Though I thought it was weird, I didn't think too much about it. Now, it seems..." She took in a deep breath, her face was visibly pale.

"Someone or some force can change those humanoid dolls into... umm... could we consider them real people? If this conjecture is right, it could explain why they're so weird. They appear strange because they retain a lot of their doll characteristics — for example, their expressions don't change, and they tiptoe when they walk because they were manufactured like this."

Hai Tianqing frowned as he mulled over it, "Tiptoeing, a

proportionate body, a normal height..."

"They are plastic mannequins displayed in clothing stores." Lin Sanjiu showed another wry smile. "That's why they showed no reaction when B.Rabbit and I touched them... They don't even have pores, so naturally, they won't bleed to death."

"I see! Those mannequins are made of high temp plastics which have high melting points. No wonder they said they're not afraid of the heat. They don't get tired either," Hu Changzai said with some realization.

"I wonder who brought these mannequins and toys... to life?" Hai Tianqing found himself at a loss for words. "On top of that, who gave each of these fake people a powerful weapon like that?"

None of them could answer these questions. They could only look at the Elsas that were outside. However, the gap was really too small, and the patrolling Beret Men blocked their sight every now and then, so this was not sufficient for them to get a clear picture of what was happening.

"Let's make a hole in the ceiling and look out from there," Lin Sanjiu suggested. "We will be able to see more from the top. Don't forget, we're in a white shipping container right now."

Hearing that was like a slap to Hu Changzai. A surprised smile appeared on his face which was still covered with a black computer circuit-like patterns. "Right! I still have that Tofu knife!"

[Tofu Knife]

"Description: A beautiful Tofu Xi Shi requested Pockmark Wang to create [this knife](#). This knife might not be good for anything, but it is perfect for cutting tofu. After a long time has passed, it can not only cut through tofu, but it can cut through any white item. Cutting any white item is as easy as cutting tofu with this knife. The logic might be weird, but this is how it is."

This was also an item they had won from the Red vs. White

Challenge and was unexpectedly useful in this situation. Reaching the ceiling was not a difficult feat — Lin Sanjiu stepped on Hai Tianqing and jumped up. She reached the ceiling and stabbed it with the ordinary-looking fruit knife (the Tofu knife) creating a small opening. The Tofu knife worked just as described, it easily cut through the metal ceiling like tofu without any resistance. Lin Sanjiu did this a few times and finally create a square window opening on the ceiling as a piece of the metal fell. Afraid that it would make some noise, Hu Changzai caught the metal piece before it fell to the ground.

Even though he was fast, a few people nearby were woken by the commotion. Noticing what they were doing, people surrounded them and looked up at Lin Sanjiu who was clinging on to the edges of the window.

"What is the situation outside?"

"Are those weirdos still around? How many of them are patrolling this place?"

"It has been such a long time. They should be sleeping, right?"

Those few people knew lesser than Lin Sanjiu and her companions, so they wanted to ask many questions.

Lin Sanjiu gritted her teeth, unable to say a word. As the rim of the "window" was very sharp, she felt that her palms were about to bleed, especially as she was supporting her entire weight using only her hands.

The rest of them watched her anxiously. Lin Sanjiu was the only one who could jump that high because of her Overall Physical Enhancement. Hai Tianqing realized that she was in trouble, so he quickly took off his top, rolled it into a ball and threw it upwards. "Xiao Jiu, use this to cushion your hands!"

Lin Sanjiu stretched out to grab the top, but her fingers just brushed past it. Just when the others thought she had missed, a

mouthpart appeared in her hand, and she used it to pull the top toward her. Then, the mouthpart disappeared. Lin Sanjiu cushioned her hands with the clothes and steadied her body with the strength of her arms.

The audiences below let out a sigh of relief.

"Young lady, what's it like outside?" someone from beneath her asked nervously.

Lin Sanjiu ignored the question and looked out in a daze.

Ever since Hyperthermal Hell descended on their world, she had not seen so many "people". There were heads everywhere, on the pier, the roads, and around the containers. They filled every available space like a black patch of fallen gray clouds tightly clustered together. The crowd was very silent and extremely orderly as if they were all following an inaudible command.

As she looked across the sea of heads, she spotted mannequins like the Beret Men and toys like the Elsas. She even saw some women who looked abnormally thin. When they turned to their sides, they revealed their flat, 2d bodies—they were probably cardboard standees used for advertising.

Seeing the stiff, lifeless smiles on the faces of most of these "people", Lin Sanjiu shivered a little.

Just when she was stunned by the scene before her, the crowd suddenly parted creating a clear path. She followed the path with her eyes and finally saw a normal man of blood and flesh.

The man was wearing an odd attire. He walked slowly and leisurely to the pier.

Lin Sanjiu stuck her head further out and stared hard at the man, without moving her eyes away from him. He continued walking, then he paused, turning to say something to the "people" around him.

Next, as if someone had given an order, thousands of stiff faces

slowly turned around, and every single pair of lackluster eyes was now looking back at Lin Sanjiu, who was still peeking out from the window.

Tofu Xishi is a character in Lu Xun's novel, which describes a beautiful woman who sells tofu with her beauty. Pockmark Wang - Wang Mazi was famous for making knives and scissors during the Qing dynasty.

Chapter 96: The Puppeteer

"Hello, everybody. Let me introduce myself, I am Puppeteer."

This was the first sentence that the man in a strange outfit said as he walked up to his stage.

The "stage" he was standing on was a shipping container which had been flipped to its side by the Beret Men. Just moments before, this man who called himself "Puppeteer" was guided to the stage by the multitudes of mannequins and dolls who seemed to worship him. Even without using a microphone, his words sounded clearly in each of the 219 Posthumans' ears.

The posthumans, who were walking out from two shipping containers, were forced by the mannequins to line up in orderly rows, then, the mannequins encircled them. Originally, there should have been more than 219 Posthumans standing under the stage, listening.

However, during the process, more than ten people tried to resist and escape. These failed escapees were caught, and their legs were cleanly amputated; the mannequins carried the remaining upper bodies of those people on their shoulders and walked past the stage, possibly bringing them up to be examined by Puppeteer. The man touched each of those Posthumans' forehead once and shook his head lightly each time. After that, the mannequin promptly threw the people off their shoulders and into the dried up ocean below them, not caring if those people lived or died.

Lin Sanjiu noticed a human leg still wrapped in a pair of jeans on the ground near to her when she heard Puppeteer speak again.

"If you do not wish to get hurt, please give me your kind cooperation. I only have this simple request, and there is no need for anyone to get hurt," Puppeteer smiled, sounding courteous.

The crowd below started getting restless, but just like the last

winter gust in spring, the commotion immediately died down once the surrounding weirdos stared at them.

Puppeteer looked around, and even though he was still smiling, his gaze was cold and unfeeling. It was impossible to tell how old he was. His occasional movements seemed to lean toward him being a young man, yet, when he crossed his arms and stood still, he seemed older. It was as if he might fit whatever age he was labeled with.

To add to that enigma, it was difficult to tell what his personality was from the clothes he wore. His entire attire was too strange: his top consisted of an amalgamation of multiple black strips with slits in between which revealed his pale, delicate skin; it was best described as a leather jacket thrown into a blender. He wore a large, scarlet red, cockscomb-like accessory on his back which swayed as he walked and a pair of black, thigh-high boots.

"I have a question," he had a mellow voice, but it caught everyone's attention immediately.

"Is there a Consular Officer among the 219 of you?"

The crowd remained silent. Those who looked confused, trying to get some answer from the others, were probably new Posthumans, and Hyperthermal Hell was the first New World they experienced; therefore, they knew nothing about the matter regarding consular officers. Those who looked down and kept quiet, or turned pale with shock, were probably from another world.

Even after waiting for a few minutes, no one spoke.

"Oh. A group of 219 is still too small..." Puppeteer sighed, feeling a little unsatisfied by the response. He could only do the next best thing, "Fine. Which of you have information about the Consular Officer here?"

Lin Sanjiu's heart tightened when she remembered Fang Dan.

She exchanged a glance with Hu Changzai. Despite knowing that it wasn't quite possible for Puppeteer to spot her among over 200 people, she couldn't help lowering her head as if she was trying to hide what she knew. When she looked down, she suddenly noticed the trembling legs of the short man standing in front of her.

She was puzzled. The current situation didn't seem that scary...

Somehow, the short man couldn't stand properly, it felt as if he would fall any second. Unexpectedly, he mustered his courage and spoke with a faltering voice, "Ma... Master Puppeteer..."

As there was total silence, Puppeteer, who was standing on the stage, heard his voice even though it wasn't loud.

[Master Puppeteer? Isn't that too much of a kiss-*ss?]

An unfathomable smile appeared on Puppeteer's face. "Speak."

"Yes, yes... I spent four to five months trying to find the Consular Officer in this region. However, I heard that he traveled to the North... so, you might not find him here," the short man replied fearfully.

Lin Sanjiu noticed the two words "this region". If she thought about it logically, considering the size of Earth, if there were only one Consular Officer in each world, the probability of meeting the Consular Officer would be way too small.

Puppeteer's smile faded as he asked, "Oh, can anyone provide me additional information about the Consular Officer here?"

There was silence once again.

"Ah, alright. It isn't that I don't want to believe all of you, but I think I still need to check each of you to confirm that a Consular Officer isn't hiding here," Puppeteer's voice was still gentle and cordial as he walked and explained himself at the same time. A platoon of mannequins immediately followed behind him like a group of security guards.

He walked to the first person standing in the first row. The teenager instantly became defensive, asking, "What are you going to do?"

"You don't have to be nervous," Puppeteer said gently as if he was consoling a child, but everyone could still hear his voice clearly, "I just want to know if you're a Consular Officer. It won't hurt."

As he said this, he had already touched the teenager's forehead, and it happened in an instant.

The teenager looked as if he was just about to resist, but before he even took out his weapon, Puppeteer had already moved on. Just as promised, it didn't hurt at all, so the teenager stood awkwardly, not knowing what to do momentarily. Other than appearing a little disappointed, Puppeteer ignored him and continued to the next person. "I am not a Consular Officer, or whatever! Can I leave?" the teenager shouted.

Puppeteer nodded. "Of course. But you'll have to wait a little while."

With that, a mannequin stepped up and blocked the teenager's path. The teenager remained in his spot with a doubtful expression.

"Idiot," the short man in front of Lin Sanjiu suddenly mumbled to himself. He grabbed the sides of his pants tightly, appearing to be very nervous.

Lin Sanjiu had a sudden thought as she whispered, "Hey, which world are you from?"

The short man was a little stunned when he heard her, he peeked to his side, not expecting that someone would try to start a conversation with him in such circumstances. He had an average look, but he had a pair of lively eyes. He stared at Lin Sanjiu for a second before he replied, "Whiteout Blizzard. Are you also..."

Lin Sanjiu nodded and answered secretively as if matching his

code word, "Black Death City."

This was the name of a location she had seen on Ren Nan's visa.

"Oh, I've been there. Black Death City is gradually stabilizing... Sigh, not only is it inconvenient being in a backward place like Hyperthermal Hell, I didn't even expect that..."

Before he finished his sentence, he shuddered and swallowed his words.

"That's right. I didn't expect to be so unlucky. Meeting Puppeteer here, of all places..." Lin Sanjiu sighed, guessing what the man intended to say.

"So, you've heard of him." The short man sighed again.

"Yeah," Lin Sanjiu answered curtly, hiding her curiosity.

"This is rare. So, you're someone who has also been to 'Twelve Worlds Centrum'. Sigh... From your reaction, you probably don't know the newest rumor about Puppeteer?" As if suddenly remembering something, the short man introduced himself, "Oh, I am Shen Lianqi, by the way. Let's be friends. Who knows? Maybe we'll meet again at Twelve World Centrum..."

Lin Sanjiu gave her name, suppressing the strong urge to ask what "Twelve World Centrum" was.

"What is the latest rumor?" she asked a little urgently.

Shen Lianqi turned pale as their conversation was drawn to this topic again. "I heard that Puppeteer has leveled up, and it's pretty scary... Recently, even his usual rivals are avoiding him. They all left for other New Worlds. After all, once you've reached the same tier as those big shots, it becomes extremely difficult to level up one's ability! Nobody knows what is going to happen, so everyone is just monitoring the situation. Sigh... Actually, we are nobodies and shouldn't even get involved. I'd never expected that he would come to this remote backwater..."

Even though she couldn't comprehend a lot of what he said, she quickly memorized the details. "Hey, what do you think Puppeteer is planning to do with us today?" Lin Sanjiu asked. She took time to phrase this question in a way that would most likely elicit an answer from Shen Lianqi.

"Ugh, I am guessing..." Shen Lianqi fixed his gaze on Puppeteer. He noticed that after each time Puppeteer touched someone's forehead, a mannequin would stand beside that person. He shifted uncomfortably and answered, "I heard that his usual followers disappeared for some time. When they reappeared, they had already become his puppets. They couldn't even smile on their own accord, but they could still use their abilities.

"As you know, these puppets here have no active abilities. If it weren't for 'The Munitions Factory', these things would be pretty useless. I heard that he can turn humans into his puppets now. I guess he is probably trying to amass a group of human puppets so that he could break away from 'The Munitions Factory'. But it is difficult for him to do that within the Twelve Worlds Centrum, so this is probably the reason why he is going to all the newly formed worlds."

Once Shen Lianqi began talking about this hot topic which he was interested in and the various information he heard from the grapevine, he couldn't stop. He did not notice Lin Sanjiu's companions turning pale as he continued.

"You mean he intends to turn all 219 of us into his puppets?"

Shen Lianqi didn't reply. After a while, he muttered, "Sigh, let's wait and see. If things get out of control, we'll just have to escape using our own abilities."

Lin Sanjiu felt uneasy as she watched Puppeteer who was not far from her, and she exchanged looks with her companions. Shen Lianqi had probably survived quite a few worlds, so he must have some tricks up his sleeves. However, they couldn't help wondering

how they were going to escape.

Puppeteer was moving quickly, so he had already checked about 100 people in that short frame of time and was reaching Lin Sanjiu and the rest. As the scarlet red cockscomb gradually came closer, they could hear the sound of crunching leather from Puppeteer's attire as he walked.

"Xiao Jiu, I suddenly remembered something..." B.Rabbit's voice sounded in her ears. "Isn't he planning to touch everybody's forehead?"

Lin Sanjiu hesitated for a moment and quickly understood what he meant.

"Your Versu Poison will kill him in a few seconds. What's there to be afraid of?"

B.Rabbit's words sounded in his three other companions' ears at the same time, and they immediately looked more relaxed. They were so overwhelmed by the new information about Puppeteer and the new terms like "Twelve Worlds Centrum" that they nearly forgot that they were protected by Versu Poison. Since those mannequins were products of Puppeteer's ability, they didn't have to be afraid of those things once Puppeteer died.

The moment Puppeteer withdrew his finger from Shen Lianqi's forehead, Lin Sanjiu, feeling the confidence from her poisoned body, almost wished that Puppeteer would reach her sooner.

Puppeteer stepped forward and stood directly in front of Lin Sanjiu. He narrowed his eyes, sizing her up. Looking at him at close proximity, the Puppeteer had hauntingly intriguing features — his long, slender eyes were surrounded by gold dust which glittered under the sun. Even though he was very tall, he did not have an imposing stature due to his slim frame and pallid skin.

Puppeteer flashed her a gentle smile as he lifted his finger.

Lin Sanjiu held her breath.

He moved his finger until it was just in front of her forehead. Then, he stopped just a few millimeters away from her skin.

"Oh, you're inflicted with [Versu Poison]."

Chapter 97: The Choice of a Growth-type Posthuman

When Lin Sanjiu considered what had happened on that day in retrospect, she couldn't help wondering if everything would have turned out differently if she had thrust her forehead forward.

However, she knew that the idea of using her forehead to touch his hand was just oversimplifying things. The truth was that she didn't even dare to move when his finger was pointing at her.

No one was holding her back or restricting her movement, but when she stood in front of Puppeteer, she sensed the underlying aura that the man exuded. She felt as if she was looking at a monster in an abyss, one that hid in a dark mist showing only its silhouette. She was frightened, and her legs turned wobbly by simply looking at him directly.

Lin Sanjiu lost all courage to move.

Puppeteer did not have the intention of pressurizing her. He looked at her indifferently, and it was obvious that his main focus wasn't even on Lin Sanjiu. That short interlude of him discovering her Versu Poison only delayed him for a few seconds. Lin Sanjiu only noticed the red ring on his finger when he withdrew his hand. He took off the ring and pressed it on her forehead, carefully avoiding her skin. Once it touched her head, he sighed, "You're not a Consular Officer. I was betting my stakes on you..."

From his reaction, he had probably remembered her face when he saw her peering out from the container.

The ring was most likely a testing device which could help him identify a Consular Officer. With that, it must be much easier for him. Lin Sanjiu eyed it for a second before she gathered her courage and said, "Mas... Master Puppeteer," she greeted him the same way as Shen Lianqi.

Puppeteer walked past her without looking back, acknowledging her with a short, "Um?" Meanwhile, he pressed the ring on Hu Changzai's forehead in the same manner. A mannequin immediately stepped forward and stood right in front of Lin Sanjiu.

"The Consular Officer in this region has died..." The image of Fang Dan sitting on the ground with a knife sticking out from her stomach flashed passed Lin Sanjiu's mind. She took in a deep breath, trying her best to ignore the mannequin standing in front of her, "I saw it with my own eyes."

Puppeteer froze for a second.

"Is that so?" he maintained his cordial, mild voice while he turned his gold-dusted eyes at Lin Sanjiu. "Why didn't you say that when I asked?"

Her heart dropped for a second but, thinking that it wasn't that serious, she opened her mouth wanting to explain herself. Just then, she caught a glimpse of Shen Lianqi's face. His face now looked ten times gloomier than before. Her heart froze, and her words were stuck in her throat.

"Since you addressed me as Master, you should know my temperament." Puppeteer maintained his tranquil expression. "You made me stand on the stage like an idiot while you quietly kept that answer in your stomach. Are you mocking me?"

"This... was not..."

The situation seemed dire.

Lin Sanjiu was regretting over her action, with her body fully tensed. Unexpectedly, Puppeteer ignored her and walked to the next person.

[From this reaction, this person isn't so tyrannical after all...] Just as this thought surfaced in Lin Sanjiu's mind, she heard someone muttered in a tearful voice, "Sh*t..."

It belonged to Shen Lianqi.

"What's wrong?" Lin Sanjiu asked quickly.

Shen Lianqi looked at her with a complex expression, "Considering Pu— Master Puppeteer's temper, don't you know what it means if he just let you off the hook?"

Lin Sanjiu did not know what that meant at all.

Staring back at her ignorant face, Shen Liangi stomped his leg and exclaimed, "You may look intelligent but... Oh God, you're stupid! We are all dead meat to Puppeteer. That's why he didn't even bother dealing with you..."

"The rumor must be true... things can't continue like this..." he mumbled to himself as his face turned white.

Noticing his odd behavior, the mannequin standing beside Shen Lianqi lifted its arm. Lin Sanjiu only noticed then that the mannequin standing near them did not hold any guns. The mannequin reached out to grab Shen Lianqi's arms. The latter moved his arms, and Lin Sanjiu didn't see him doing anything else, yet, he managed to chop off one of the mannequin's hands stealthily.

The hand which seemed to resemble a real human's hand, turned to plastic once it fell from the mannequin's arm. It fell to the ground with a "thud". Puppeteer, who had already walked a few meters away from them, stopped.

"Do you want to die?" Hu Changzai commented before Lin Sanjiu could say anything, "He's coming!"

"I'm sorry, I can't help you. Didn't I tell you that we'll have to escape using our own capabilities..." Shen Lianqi flashed Lin Sanjiu a forced smile.

Puppeteer turned around and walked toward them leisurely. After a few steps, he was already behind Hu Changzai.

"300km to the south..." Shen Lianqi forced himself not to turn back as cold sweat poured from his forehead. "Directed Jump!"

Once he said that, his body rose to the sky like a rocket, throwing off the mannequin who had flung itself at him. His body shot toward the south, and soon he was a mere dot in the sky, all that was left behind was a cloud of dust.

"Ah, that's a creation from 'The Munitions Factory'." Puppeteer was too late, but he did not appear frustrated. "I didn't expect to find a resident from Twelve Worlds Centrum."

He turned around, and Lin Sanjiu couldn't help taking a step back. Surprisingly, Puppeteer paid no attention to her, he beckoned for the mannequin on the floor and asked it, "Who saw that person's face?"

The mannequin, who was wearing woman's clothes, lifted its face rigidly and slowly pointed to Lin Sanjiu. Puppeteer turned to look at her, the gold dust on his face dazzled under the sun.

[Oh no!] this was the first thought that came to Lin Sanjiu's mind. She acted almost intuitively, she pumped her legs and jumped backward. At the same time, she pulled out her long whip-like mouthpart and struck the plastic mannequin which had lunged itself at her.

The mannequin's head fell to the ground. Simultaneously, Lin Sanjiu landed heavily and skidded backward for a few meters before she steadied herself. When she looked up again, she realized that Puppeteer was standing right in front of her, and he was smiling. They were still the same distance apart from each other. It was as if she didn't even move from her previous position.

"Don't run. I just need your pair of eyes..."

Lin Sanjiu felt cold sweat running down her spine as she gulped. She finally understood Shen Lianqi's dread. To her, this man's existence was on an entirely different tier compared to her.

Just when Puppeteer was about to move, a small brown shadow shot out of nowhere, targeting his chest; at the same time, Hu Changzai rushed behind Puppeteer and aimed his fist at the Puppeteer's exposed neck. Their goal was simple: they just needed to come in contact with the Puppeteer's skin.

Hai Tianqing, who was standing on the other side, threw aside the mannequin standing in front of him. He ran over, grabbed Lin Sanjiu's singlet and pulled her behind him, shielding her.

As the four of them had been together for some time, their coordination was quick and accurate. They blocked every opening which their opponent could use to evade the attacks. If their opponent was anyone but Puppeteer, they would have been successful. However, when B.Rabbit landed on the ground, and Hu Changzai stopped, Puppeteer was still standing idly in the middle. He was totally unharmed.

The whole situation went out of control. After witnessing a person escaping, and then another group fighting back, chaos ensued, and numerous mannequins were pushed to the ground.

"Oh really. You guys just know how to give me trouble." Puppeteer sighed and quietly ordered, "Forget it, kill the rest of them. Slit their throats. Don't damage their bodies."

He only mumbled those words, but all the plastic mannequins, dummies, and dolls seemed to have received his order at the same time. The legion of puppets charged toward the Posthumans, and before Lin Sanjiu could react, fountains of blood erupted across the pier.

Unavoidably, they were splashed by the blood around them.

"Let's flee!" Lin Sanjiu yelled out anxiously.

"But how? We are already surrounded by all his puppets!" B.Rabbit's urgent voice rang out in her ears.

Under the assault of massive, black waves of puppets, the small

battalion of 200-odd Posthumans could not last much longer. Half of the Posthumans had already been "swallowed" by the sea of enemies. The sky was decorated with blooms of blood, like brilliant fireworks. A few fine droplets of blood landed on Puppeteer's face. He lifted his finger and gently wipe off the blood satisfyingly as if enjoying everything that was happening.

"So, you're a Growth-type?" He fixed his gaze on Lin Sanjiu for a few seconds. Suddenly, he cracked his lips into a menacing smile.

"Growth-type." That was a term that Lin Sanjiu had already heard many times. Lin Sanjiu stepped out from behind Hai Tianqing and gestured for her companions to move further away from Puppeteer. "What do you mean by Growth-type?" she asked, with every intention to delay him as long as possible.

Even though she asked that question, she did not expect any answer — all of them stood defensively, preparing themselves for any sudden attacks.

"You still don't know about this?" Puppeteer nodded his head, showing an unexplainable delight. "I think it's alright for us to have a chat."

"All of us Growth-types are well-known figures among all Posthumans. Our abilities might be weak at first, but eventually, we are the ones who will hold true power." An excited flush appeared on his fair skin. "No. I should put it this way. We're a species superior to other Posthumans. "

"Are you also a Growth-type?" Lin Sanjiu asked with astonishment.

"That's right." Puppeteer nodded conceitedly as the blood-curdling screams and shrills of people, on the brink of death, surrounded them. "To be honest, I'm more suitable to be your companion. What are you doing with those low-level posthumans... If you choose to come with me, I promise to lead you down a path where no one dares defy you."

Pausing for a moment, he flashed his teeth. "But, to show your determination to be with your kind, you have to get rid of these people, yourself."

Lin Sanjiu's face tensed up, she bit down on her lower lip till it was almost white.

"Blah, Blah, Blah. You irritating old man! You are full of rubbish! Does everyone become like this when they're old?" B.Rabbit sneered coldly.

Puppeteer raised a brow, and a vicious smile appeared on his face. "I only talk to Growth-types. Commoners like all of you are quite an eyesore."

He just lifted one of his hands and was interrupted by a trembling female's voice: "Wait, let me do it!"

Hai Tianqing and the others froze. They turned to look at Lin Sanjiu while Puppeteer observed her with narrowed eyes.

Lin Sanjiu avoided her companions' gaze and whispered, "Sorry." With that, she aimed a kick at B.Rabbit.

Chapter 98: The Puppeteer's Secret

Tormented by hunger and thirst, and exposed to the elements for at least a month, Lin Sanjiu spent all her energies focused on her basic physiological needs. If it hadn't been for this unlucky encounter, she would have forgotten that she had gained a new ability from the Red vs. White Challenge.

[A Twinkle in the Sky]

"Description: This is a popular trope often seen in mangas drawn in the 90s. That was a time when there were restrictions on publishing blood in weekly magazines, so the main character's opponent usually gets blasted off with a single punch. Ignoring the law of gravity, the opponent will vanish into the distant sky. Then, a four pointed twinkle will appear along with a high-pitched ringing noise (an audible gleam). The most famous example is the scenes with the Team Rocket from the Pokemon Series! Even though the user's opponent will be blasted off to somewhere far, they will still pose a risk because if your enemy doesn't sustain any lethal injuries, they will come back to haunt you like those Team Rocket members!

"Note: There are no usage restrictions after activation so this can be used in various ways. However, the user cannot control where his/her opponent will land, and the distance is also entirely based on chance. Other than the fact that the opponent would disappear into the horizon, everything else is unpredictable."

Considering how ridiculous the ability was, Lin Sanjiu could not remember if she had even mentioned it to her companions.

Even though she did not know the extent of the damage she might inflict, this ability was probably their only way out...

After kicking away B.Rabbit and Hu Changzai, who were both caught off-guard, they flew into the sky just as described. After a while, there were two twinkles in the sky, and they heard two

resounding "Ding!". Unfortunately, from the direction where they disappeared, it would probably be quite hard for them to meet again. Just when she was about to kick Hai Tianqing, he dodged and nimbly avoided her attack.

"You're crazy!" he growled softly.

Lin Sanjiu didn't say a word, she showed him a stoic face as she immediately followed up with another kick.

At that moment, the massacre was still ongoing. Horrible screams, angry curses, and fresh blood filled the air causing Lin Sanjiu to nearly miss hearing Hai Tianqing's next words, "If you kick us away, how are you going to escape? Are you going to kick yourself?"

Lin Sanjiu stole a glance at Puppeteer. Despite the chaos, he was still smiling enigmatically. She suddenly felt a wave of anxiousness. "Cut the crap. He has already noticed! Quick! Let me kick you!"

Hai Tianqing's might be huge, but he was surprisingly nimble. He ignored Lin Sanjiu, dodging sideways to avoid another kick and rushed toward Puppeteer.

"Oh? Aren't you going to let her kick you?" Puppeteer laughed. He had been watching them with his arms crossed, but now he slowly moved his arms.

[No matter how strong Hai Tianqing is, he definitely has no chance of winning against Puppeteer now...]

Lin Sanjiu was panicking. She felt as if her heart was about to leap out of her throat. She let out a meaningless shout and dashed forward. However, she couldn't kick Hai Tianqing considering where he was standing; otherwise, he might just end up in Puppeteer's hands. She gritted her teeth, removed her singlet and rapidly wrapped it around her hand. Before Hai Tianqing noticed, she gave him a hook punch.

Even though she didn't really put any strength into it, [A Twinkle in the Sky] was immediately activated.

Hai Tianqing's mountain-like body, covered with sturdy muscles, suddenly rose steeply from the ground, barely missing Puppeteer's outstretched hand. He was flung into the sky by an incorporeal force. His silhouette grew smaller and smaller until he finally vanished, and a twinkle appeared in the sky. Lin Sanjiu felt relieved only when she heard that familiar "Ding!"

Following which, she felt a little puzzled.

When her fist touched Hai Tianqing, she heard him shouting something like: "Rad mail?"

[What's rad mail?]

But, right now she didn't have any time to care about that. After Hai Tianqing was gone, Puppeteer took one step closer. Somehow, his smile had faltered a little.

In contrast, the surrounding massacre became more and more intense. The remaining Posthumans, who could last this long, definitely had some capability, and they began to split into small teams to fight against their enemies. Apart from the display of splattering blood and flesh, countless broken mannequin limbs fluttered to the skies, but nobody dared to attack Puppeteer directly, so they stood in the middle of an empty space with no one near them.

Puppeteer did not seem to mind his army dwindling. He took out a white handkerchief and wiped his hands in a slow and deliberate manner. He grinned, "I don't like you."

"Same here," after she said that, she realized that her lips were trembling. She quickly wiped her lips and stopped their movement.

A young woman stood under the sun, she had a honey-bronze tan, and the beads of sweat on her body highlighted the contours

of her muscles. There was not a shred of excess fat on her firm, athletic body. Her black bra and combat pants were covered with dots and patches of sweat and blood stains.

At that moment, her amber eyes did not show fear, it showed tenacity.

Puppeteer gave her a sidelong glance and threw his white handkerchief on the ground. "You are really starting to annoy me. Do you think you are the main character in a novel? Upholding justice? I've killed more than 20 people that showed the same look in their eyes."

A group of people suddenly split off from the messy crowd behind him — there were about over ten of them, and they were all familiar faces. The Beret Men all held the same mysterious weapon in their hands, facing their black gun barrels at Lin Sanjiu.

"Should I give you a short introduction? This Shockwave Pistol is manufactured by the biggest ammunition company within the Twelve Worlds Centrum, The Munitions Factory. You should have already witnessed it at work." Puppeteer laughed.

"You won't use it against me." A pale taunting smile surfaced on Lin Sanjiu's face. "If those pistols blast my body to bits, you will lose a Growth-type puppet."

As she said those words, even the air seemed to stand still. "If you understand this, why don't you come over here quickly. It will save me some trouble and save you some suffering. I'll tell you something. I don't mind if you lose a limb or some of your internal organs, I can always find you some sort of replacement after you become my puppet."

If the Beret Men had emotions, they would have been amazed by their owner's good mood. Towards an ant which hasn't even evolved much, Puppeteer was showing an extraordinary level of patience. The fact that he had spent so much time talking to her proved that he was very happy...

Was this because he was going to get a Growth-type puppet soon? The next second, Puppeteer suddenly found himself feeling even happier for no particular reason.

No. That's not right... This feeling. It wasn't just happiness. It was as if he returned to a time, many years ago before the world had been destroyed, to a time when he was still a cheerful teenager without any worries. An innocent teenager who was walking through the woods in spring, when he turned and saw the beautiful girl who had been on his mind, she stood under a tree and crooked her head when she saw him. Then, she gave him a smile... It was this sort of feeling.

Lin Sanjiu had just activated [That spring, when the cherry blossoms fell, your sweet laughter melted my world] which was in her palm.

The effect was instantaneous. Even though Puppeteer's face didn't change much, his eyes suddenly grew gentler. The Beret Men also stopped and lowered their pistols. Throughout the entire pier, the movements of all the plastic mannequins, dolls, and other puppets slowed down all of a sudden as if they were no longer being commanded. Taking this opportunity, the fighting Posthumans toppled quite a few of them.

She didn't have much time. She had to use this minute to run as far as she could, otherwise...

[Huh?] She thought to herself, nearly tripping just as she was starting to sprint. After she changed [That spring, when the cherry blossoms fell, your sweet laughter melted my world] back to its original intangible form, it was just a gentle laughter which belonged to a girl. The laughter originally "twisted" around her finger making a constant "hahaha" sound, but it suddenly spoke when she was about to run away.

"As the target is only 50% male, the effect will only be sustained for half the time, that is 30sec..."

She wasn't far from the pier when the same words traveled to the Puppeteer's ears following the breeze. As he was still under its effect, he smiled and nodded bashfully, even lowering his head like he was embarrassed by it. He looked at his shoes and blushed without saying a word.

[50% male?]

"How could this even happen? Did I just make things worse!" Lin Sanjiu cursed angrily and ran away as quickly as she could from the pier.

The 30 seconds, without anyone chasing Lin Sanjiu, passed quickly.

Once Puppeteer regained his senses, a dark, threatening look like an overcast cloud instantly appeared on his face. He cringed half his face while the other half of his face remained emotionless, and his eyes glowed with a terrifying, twisted expression. He gestured to the mannequins around him and ordered with a bland tone, "Capture her. I don't care if she loses all her limbs, or her innards, or her bones... I don't even care if you dig out all of her flesh. I don't care if she is blasted to bits! I want to pour lead in her stomach and make her into a Roly-poly toy."

Right now, Lin Sanjiu was just a black dot in the distance. The black dot appeared and disappeared under the cover of the terrain, the wrecked ships, and the ruins. Like a kite with a broken string, she ran further and further away and was almost about to disappear from his sight. But, Puppeteer was not worried at all.

He only needed ten seconds to cover that distance and stand directly in front of Lin Sanjiu.

Puppeteer stepped forward but quickly frowned. "Huh?"

Chapter 99: Escaping and Entering the Deep Sea

"Huh?"

The same utterance escaped Lin Sanjiu's lips a few minutes later.

After running like mad for her life, she realized that something was amiss after some time. Unable to overcome her curiosity, she turned behind, looking in the direction where Puppeteer stood. Soon, she couldn't control her laughter. She laughed as she ran, "We're so dead. He must be so pissed... Hahaha!"

An expressionless female mannequin was chasing her. The moment the mannequin got close to her side, Lin Sanjiu slapped the mannequin's arm, and [A Twinkle in the Sky] was immediately activated. The female mannequin shot up to the sky with the same lifeless face and soon vanished into a twinkle in the sky.

"36th!" Lin Sanjiu grinned jovially as she shouted to the puppets chasing her, "Run faster! Come on! Your master can't move right now, so it's up to you guys!"

Lin Sanjiu was right. At that moment, Puppeteer really wasn't moving.

But, this wasn't entirely right either. Although Puppeteer looked exasperated, he was running at quite a quick pace. Compared to his previously indolent attitude, he seemed serious. However, no matter how hard he ran, he couldn't move even one step forward, much less even a meter. It was as if he were a hamster on a hamster wheel, he found himself stuck in the same spot.

"So that 'rad mail' referred to that!" Lin Sanjiu exclaimed.

Hai Tianqing's ability [The glory of a personal trainer: Treadmill]

"Description: After activation, one square meter of ground under the target's feet will be converted into an operational treadmill.

This treadmill is set to the highest speed and incline, so no matter how hard the target runs, they will remain stuck in the spot..."

After sending another two mannequins flying one after the other, Lin Sanjiu jumped to a higher ground to get a better vantage point. She saw the black dot representing Puppeteer suddenly stopping before it moved backward at a rapid speed. He seemed to have figured out what was happening, so he gave up running forward and instead waited so that he would be pushed off the "treadmill".

Puppeteer was indeed pushed off, but surprisingly, even someone of his level actually fell over stomach first! To make things worse, while he sprawled on the ground, his body was still moving backward, and he almost reached near the edge of the dried up ocean...

"...Note: Personal trainers do not like lazy students. If a target decides to stay still, he will fall down, and a new treadmill will appear on the spot where he falls. This will continue until the target properly finishes a 10-min jog. The treadmill will only disappear then.

"PS: Don't try jumping to the sides, you will bang your ribs against the handles."

Lin Sanjiu couldn't help feel an incredible sense of satisfaction humiliating such a dangerous character.

She ran even faster. She could hear the whooshing wind as the scenery around her quickly receded. She only slowed down when she realized that her surroundings became quiet.

After some faking and a few sharp turns, Lin Sanjiu managed to successfully get away from the mannequins chasing her. Now, the silence around her made her feel as if she were the only one left on

Earth.

"What's this place?" She gasped for air as she looked around, feeling some uncertainty.

She couldn't even spot a single remnant of a human civilization near her.

She was standing in the middle of an open terrain which was sloping downward. There were all sorts of oddly-shaped rocks, sand, and patches of marshy ground. In the far horizon behind her, a blood red sun was slowly descending. Hearing only the howling wind which blew across this otherworldly landscape, it was as if the ruins of the city and the devastation at the pier were just part of her dream.

Lin Sanjiu looked down at the paper-like, dried seaweed under her boots. She noticed the partially eroded seashells on the ground and the jet-black rocks covered with cracks... "I'm at the bottom of the ocean?"

While she ran maniacally for her life, she had somehow run to the dried-up ocean.

For now, she knew that she could not return to the land.

[There must be an army of puppets waiting on the coast.]

She turned behind and looked at the trail of footprints she had left on the sandy ground before she took out her [cat litter] card and reverted it back to its original form.

A 5kg bag of cat litter appeared out of nowhere, and Lin Sanjiu nearly missed holding on to it.

[Cat Litter]

"Description: Animals from the feline family cover their excretion with soil to hide their scent and whereabouts. Even though the color (bright orange) of this Cat Litter doesn't look like it can camouflage into any sort of environment, it can

mysteriously conceal the user's tracks.

"Instructions: Sprinkle a thin layer of cat litter over the place where you've walked passed or stayed, and with that, even super-elite hunters will not be able to find you."

"Does this really work?" Lin Sanjiu continued walking forward as she sprinkled a handful of cat litter behind her. The cat litter took on a life of its own and started covering Lin Sanjiu's tracks. With that, her footprints were covered, but the bright orange cat litter stood out as its color clearly wouldn't blend with that of the seabed. She couldn't help wondering if it would create the opposite effect.

After covering up her tracks, she observed her surroundings a little more carefully.

Even though the seabed was dry, one could still sense an eerie difference between this place and the "normal" land. The rocks were covered with the blooms of dried anemones which retained their gorgeous colors. Opened clam shells, the size of a human head, laid half buried in the sandy ground. The terrain was also covered by the skeletal remains of bleached coral reefs, sadly, fishes will never swim here again.

The carcasses of many dead sea creatures did not turn to ashes but were instead somewhat preserved by the thick layer of salt left behind after the seawater had been evaporated.

Lin Sanjiu poked one of the dead fishes on the ground, experimentally. She didn't expect that her finger would pierce through the rotten flesh without much resistance. She immediately felt a squishy mud-like sensation, and a putrid stench rushed out from the hole she had made.

"And it's inedible..." she rubbed her finger over the salt on the ground with some revulsion and felt a little worried. There was food at the pier, but the Puppeteer had already occupied that territory so she definitely couldn't go back. The only way out was

for her to walk even deeper into the ocean, but there was no food or clean water...

Luckily, Lin Sanjiu stored a crate of chocolates and a crate of coffee as cards just for emergencies when she was packing the goods back then. They could probably sustain her for some time.

Unfortunately, she did not know what had happened to B.Rabbit and the others and wondered how they would survive without food or if they were caught by Puppeteer.

When she thought of Puppeteer, she clenched her teeth and continued deeper into the ocean.

After Lin Sanjiu's figure disappeared from the shallower terrains of the ocean, a carcass of a decomposing whale, which had been rotting on the sand since who-knows-when, and whose stomach had almost become a pile of sludge, began to move.

"Squelch." Someone cut open a hole in the whale's mushy, rotting head. Two people squeezed out of the hole, one was taller than the other. They were both covered with a thick layer of black rotting whale "sludge", and the smell on them was revolting. They looked around cautiously, and when they noticed that Lin Sanjiu was already very far away, the shorter person quickly wiped his face. He subsequently shook off the black sludge all over his body.

"Brother Tie Dao, was this really necessary?" He looked very unconvinced as he continued to grumble, "That woman isn't some kind of monster. I think we'll be fine if we go over and greet her, did we really have to hide in that whale's stomach?"

While he said this, he shook his leg. A pile of black sludge plopped on the ground, revealing the teenager's uniform.

"What do you know!" Tie Dao was a little provoked by the teenager's words. "Do you think she is just an ordinary woman? You're obviously still a kid... Let me tell you what happened. I first met her about two months after the apocalypse."

"Then?" the teenager still sounded a little disinterested.

Tie Dao sighed. He found a large piece of seaweed and wiped his body as he said, "At that time, I was living in a human base camp called 'Oasis'. It was huge. There were at least 1000 people. I met her there. Did you see that rabbit and that gigantic man? They were all Executives from Oasis. I wonder how they even end up together in a team... Sigh... back to the main topic. Before this woman arrived, everything was operating fine at Oasis. The population was getting larger, and we were thriving. But two weeks after she arrived, Oasis was destroyed. There wasn't even a single brick left. I'm not exaggerating."

"What happened?" the teenager was startled.

Tie Dao summarized what happened in Oasis, from how the duoluozhongs slaughtered them and how Lin Sanjiu pulverized the entire place with a silver net. Seeing the teenager's astounded face, he gave him a "you can't go wrong listening to me" expression and concluded, "When I saw her at the pier, I nearly fainted because I knew that something bad was bound to happen. My premonition was right! My mother once told me that certain women are natural harbingers of trouble, and you'll die if you get involved with them..."

The teenager's expression suddenly turned despondent, perhaps remembering his sister who he had failed to save. Tie Dao looked at him and patted his shoulders, sighing, "Let bygones be bygones. Anyway, if you see that Lin Sanjiu again, you must avoid her..."

While both men chatted and walked towards the land, they didn't notice that there was a human buried under the layer of salt on the seabed.

The term "human" wasn't quite accurate because the exposed face had a pair of soulless, lackluster eyes and red lips which were curled into a stiff smile.

The moon made no discrimination between the now non-existent

ocean and the lands which were once occupied by humans, shining down and flooding both with its faint silver light.

Thirty minutes later...

"So, that Growth-type's name is Lin Sanjiu? Coincidentally, you landed there after you were kicked by her?" Puppeteer asked softly as he massaged his temples.

"Yes, father," a mannequin, still covered in sand and salt, replied. There were a hundred other mannequins of the same model standing silently behind Puppeteer. They all had the same vacant stare.

Puppeteer eyed it for a second and suddenly laughed, "Well, why did you continue to hide?"

"Lin Sanjiu is very powerful/I saw her destroying the other puppets. I have no chance of winning/I thought that by hiding/I might get more information from the two other people," the plastic mannequin explained without pausing.

"That sounds reasonable." Puppeteer made a weird gesture in the air as if he was playing a formless instrument. "By the way, humans speak with inflections and pauses. Come, why don't you try?"

The mannequin opened its mouth, and its voice came out awkwardly. This was its first time trying to speak in this manner, and it even looked a little challenged by the feat: "Yes fa... Father."

Puppeteer's eyes beamed as he placed a hand on the mannequin's head, "Wow! This is your first try, but you were able to break up your words! If this continues, you will become even more intelligent and even more like a real human."

"Thank...you. Father..." it replied with a slight hint of emotion.

The head of the mannequin was crushed by Puppeteer the very next second. Fragments of its head fall from its neck and shoulders to the ground, exposing its inner stuffing. The headless mannequin

fell motionless to the ground under the view of all the other mannequins vacant stares.

"What a pity. I don't need a real human. I need a puppet. If you had acted like a normal puppet who isn't afraid of death and attacked her, I would have been able to get her location even if you had been wrecked..." Puppeteer took out a white handkerchief and clean the broken fragments and dust between his fingers. "When we return to Twelve Worlds Centrum, get someone to check the Consular Officer Database, see if there is the name 'Lin Sanjiu'. Inform me once it appears," Puppeteer ordered without turning behind.

Once she had entered the vast ocean, Puppeteer did not have any easy way of finding Lin Sanjiu. But if she doesn't die and finds a Consular Officer, her name will be registered into the Consular Officer Database once she requests a visa. If that happens, it will be extremely easy for Puppeteer to find her.

"Yes," a tall, muscular bloke replied, his skin was rough, and there was a long knife scar across his face. He was definitely not a mannequin, but his eyes were equally vacant.

"If she's smart, dying of starvation in the depths of the ocean would be a far better choice for her." Puppeteer laughed, wrinkling half his face. "Otherwise, she will regret this. No one will die painlessly after humiliating me, Puppeteer."

Chapter 100: Mcdonald's

Puppeteer mentioned that Lin Sanjiu would fare better if she died of starvation in the depths of the ocean. But from the current circumstances, it probably wouldn't happen because...

Lin Sanjiu was standing right in front of the doors of a Mcdonald's...

—

It has already been a month since she was nearly caught by Puppeteer. Lin Sanjiu had not a single good night's sleep for the entire month, so she had very obvious dark eye circles. As she couldn't find portable water, she could only sustain herself with coffee; thus, she was constantly in a sleep-deprived, hyperaroused state. Despite this, she did not give up searching for clues regarding the whereabouts of B.Rabbit and the others.

The Puppeteer had probably decided to settle down at the pier because his mannequins occupied the entire coastal area. Due to this situation, Lin Sanjiu did not dare to go near the shore. She could only search in a circular manner as she continued deeper into the ocean.

But her search was futile, and she even got lost.

Logically speaking, it was quite predictable. If a person was thrown in the middle of the ocean without a nautical chart or a compass, they would definitely lose their bearings. By that point, Lin Sanjiu did not know where the shore was, and that could be a life-threatening problem.

Without any seawater, the sun-baked seabed emitted an odd-smelling fishy stench which wouldn't go away. The seabed was not entirely flat, and soon she saw more seamounds and knolls until the terrain was like a forest of rolling hills. After climbing quite a few of these hills, Lin Sanjiu stood midway of the tallest hill and

started feeling a vague sense of anxiousness.

She took stock of her supplies and realized that she had only three boxes of chocolates left. She was almost running out of food, but she was still clueless about the road ahead.

When she reached the peak, she looked out and saw that there was a fissure on the ground about one kilometer away, and as it only looked like a patch of black, she couldn't tell much about it. She only knew that it was an oceanic trench.

After coming down the hill, she went to the edge of the trench.

Even though the probability of finding food in the deep sea was even slimmer, Lin Sanjiu was very curious as she had never seen an oceanic trench before. She leaned over the edge and looked down. The seabed instantly fell away, and it was as if her feet were dangerously close to a cliff's edge. It fell steeply a few thousand meters down into the dark, deep base of the trench without a single gentle slope. It was impossible for the light from the stars in the night sky to reach the trench, so Lin Sanjiu could only see an indiscernible darkness and the extremely steep precipice.

[Anyone who still thinks about climbing down after seeing this must be crazy...] Lin Sanjiu rebuked herself as she held on to a jutting rock with some difficulty and climbed downward carefully. Her palms hurt badly as they were scratched by the abrasive surface of the rocks and the salt crystals on them. Even professional rock climbers would think twice before taking on such a challenging climb. If her body weren't physically enhanced, this trench would have easily been her burial ground.

"Why didn't you turn back just now?" she asked herself a little regretfully.

[So what if I'm lost, if I continue walking toward the flatter areas, there should be a better chance of survival than going down this trench, right?]

Just when she had decided to turn back, she suddenly heard a familiar sound. She had not heard this sound since the New World had descended. It was the sound of water.

It sounded like waves gently hitting the sides of the rock wall. Lin Sanjiu crouched for a moment, staring into the dark abyss, imagining what the seawater would look like. Even if almost the whole world has died, in the depths of the ocean, there was still water, and she was still alive. Just like how mankind will still live on.

The sound of the waves reminded Lin Sanjiu of her one peaceful, ordinary, and even a little boring, life. She leaned against the rocky wall, pausing to listen to the waves for quite some time.

Of course, that alone wouldn't change her mind, as she convinced herself that she would never go down.

But, while she was staring blankly at the bottom of the trench, she saw something flashing by in the darkness. The light flickered for a few times as if there was a bad electrical connection before it finally stabilized. The eye-catching bright yellow light illuminated an M-shaped sign, the familiar golden arches.

[Mcdonald's.]

For a split second, Lin Sanjiu thought that she finally had a nervous breakdown due to the various events she went through after the apocalypse. It did not make sense to her that there would be a Mcdonald's sign in the middle of the deep sea when the whole world was already destroyed.

[No. It isn't only a sign.] Lin Sanjiu was dumbfounded when she saw another two flashes of light beside the M-shaped sign. As if she could even hear the "Bzzt!" as the electricity ran through the fluorescent lights, a Mcdonald's restaurant lit up in the darkness, right in front of her eyes.

The entrance was lit by a warm, inviting yellow light, and since it

was very far away, Lin Sanjiu couldn't see the restaurant clearly, but she could clearly read the white on red "McDonald's".

After drinking a month of nothing but coffee, Lin Sanjiu, the insomniac, didn't think too much despite having an inkling that there was something wrong, she just stepped onto the next jutting rock and continued her way towards the bottom of the trench.

Her appetite which had been turned off by her diet of melted chocolate seemed to suddenly come alive, and her stomach began spamming hunger signals to her brain. As she climbed downward, she couldn't help thinking about those tasty fried McWings.

Climbing down a few thousand meters down such a precipice was a strenuous activity even for a Posthuman. The blade of the knife that Lin Sanjiu used while she climbed was already bent out of shape. There were many wounds on her fingers, and to make matters worse, her hands were covered with salt, so the pain she was experiencing was immense. When she was near to the bottom, she was stumbling rather than climbing. Without her singlet, Lin Sanjiu realized that her whole body was covered with bruises and abrasions when she stood up once again.

Fortunately, she had reached the bottom of the trench.

—

The Mcdonald's with its comforting lights, 200 meters away from her, was like a beautiful dream. Through the crystal clear glass doors, Lin Sanjiu could see the sparkling clean, red-tiled floor, the shining metal countertop, and the overly well-lit English menu board... A picture-perfect Big Mac, so large that one could not take a bite properly, was on an advertisement board. That thick beef patty, the vegetables, the cheese... It was like a beguiling siren.

Lin Sanjiu walked toward it in a daze. She stepped on the soft lumpy wet sand, then stepped into the seawater with a splash.

[There is something wrong. There is really something wrong. How could there be a clean McDonald's with working light here? But, what am I looking at?]

She did not need to slap herself because the pain from her multiple superficial wounds was enough proof that she was sober.

The glass door detected her approaching and immediately opened without a sound. The fragrant smell of food instantly invaded her, and Lin Sanjiu stepped into the McDonald's as if sleep-walking. Then, the glass door closed behind her.

Lin Sanjiu looked around, feeling bewildered. There was no one in the restaurant, but the delicious smell of food continued drifting towards her. Lin Sanjiu pulled out her mouthpart weapon and started walking toward the counter cautiously.

From where she was, she couldn't see anything. The deep fryer for the fries was empty. Lin Sanjiu found her disappointment rather humorous — how could there be food in a restaurant in the middle of the deep sea?

However, she couldn't control herself from walking around the counter and heading to the back kitchen. She was nearly there when she heard a sudden rumbling sound. It seemed to come from the very back of the kitchen.

Lin Sanjiu stopped and turning her ear toward the sound, trying to listen for it once again, but she heard nothing. The situation was too strange, she felt that she wasn't thinking clearly and that it wasn't wise to act rashly at that moment, so she hesitated and did not walk into the kitchen. Instead, she climbed up the counter, stretched her arm and stuck her [Teru Teru Bozu Defense System] on the ceiling.

Once she hung it up, a loud, sharp screech pierced through the air. The Teru Teru Bozu was spinning in circles rapidly, unable to pinpoint the exact direction of the danger. It was spinning so fast that it was almost just a blur. Shocked, Lin Sanjiu's mind

immediately became much clearer. She grabbed the doll, jumped down the counter and ran for the door.

The glass door did not budge.

"What the hell is happening?"

The glass door, which appeared fragile, did not show a single crack even after Lin Sanjiu struck it quite a few times with her maximum strength. She looked around hurriedly, trying to find a window but realized that there were no windows in this McDonald's. Unfortunately, the Teru Teru Bozu seemed to be distraught, it continued its sharp, crying screech even after Lin Sanjiu had taken it down, making Lin Sanjiu even more anxious.

Water started gushing through the red tiles on the floor, and the floor became sticky and slippery. The lights started flickering, and then there was darkness all around her. Lin Sanjiu couldn't see much, and the scariest thing was that the floor was slowly beginning to slant. The floor quickly reached a very steep slant as if someone had lifted the restaurant and tipped it to its side, as if eager for Lin Sanjiu to slide down into the back kitchen.

The floor began to tilt even more, and Lin Sanjiu fell on the floor. She tried to grip on to the floor, attempting to stop herself from slipping downward, but it was useless. She could only feel a slippery moisture and nothing else.

As if sensing that her body was slipping downward, the counter disappeared without a trace, creating a clear path toward the back kitchen. Lin Sanjiu didn't want to entertain the thought of what was inside.

Just as she was struggling insanely not to slip further, the restaurant suddenly stopped.

The floor vibrated violently for a while before it slowly laid flat again. Even though it was too dark to see anything, Lin Sanjiu felt a gust of wind with the smell of seawater coming from the

direction of the door; the door was probably open. The unforeseen event ended as fast as it began. Lin Sanjiu laid on the floor, still stunned. Suddenly, some sort of fishy liquid gushed out from the back of the restaurant and washed her out of the door involuntarily.

"Splosh." She was thrown into the seawater outside.

Lin Sanjiu struggled to stand up. There wasn't a single glimmer of light around her so she couldn't tell what had just happened. The silence surrounding her made it seem as though entering that weird McDonald's was just a dream.

[It'll be great if there was some light.] This thought surfaced in her mind, and she suddenly remembered something. She quickly took out a card, and a silvery light appeared in her hand. A wide area around her was instantly illuminated. The thing in her hand was the [Ability Polishing Agent] she had taken from Ren Nan's corpse.

Under the shimmering, silver light, she stared at the thing before her eyes, stupefied. She couldn't say a word.

It was a gigantic fish.

The fish was staring at her with a pair of white eyes without pupils. Its mouth, the size of a train carriage, was half opened revealing its set of dense, uneven, jagged teeth. Only half the fish was above the surface of the water, and blood was spouting from its dark colored skin. Like countless little water fountains, the fish's blood poured into the seawater beneath it.

The magnet of her attention was the long appendage on its lower jaw which looked like a fluorescent tube.

"Lin Sanjiu? Did you kill this Deep-sea Dragonfish?"

Lin Sanjiu suddenly heard a voice in the darkness, coming from behind the large fish head.

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